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THE WORKS

OF

LORD MORLEY

John Morley, viscount

IN

FIFTEEN VOLUMES

VOLUME XII

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BIOGRAPHICAL STUDIES

BY

JOHN VISCOUNT MORLEY

O.M.

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED

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TURGOT

I

ANNE-ROBERT-JACQUES TURGOT was born in Paris on the 10th of May 1727. He died in 1781. His life covered rather more than half a century, extending, if we may put it a little roughly, over the middle fifty years of the eighteenth century. This middle period marks the exact date of the decisive and immediate preparation for the Revolution. At its beginning neither the intellectual nor the social elements of the great disruption had distinctly appeared, or begun their active fermentation.

In 1727 Voltaire was returning from his exile in England, to open the long campaign of which he was from that time forth to the close of his days the brilliant and indomitable captain. He died in 1778, bright, resolute, humane, energetic, to the last. Thus Turgot's life was almost exactly contemporary with the pregnant era of Voltaire's activity. In the same spring in which Turgot died, Maurepas too came to his end, and Necker was dismissed. The last event was the signal at which the floods of the deluge fairly began to rise, and the revolutionary tide to swell.

Turgot was born half a generation after the first race of the speculative revolutionists. Rousseau, Diderot, Helvétius, Condillac, D'Alembert, as well as the foreign Hume, so much the greatest of the whole band of innovators, because

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penetrating so much nearer to the depths, all came into the world they were to confuse so unspeakably, in the half-dozen years between 1711 and 1717. Turgot was of later stock and comes midway between these fathers of the new church, between Hume, Rousseau, Diderot, Leibnitz, Lessing, and the generation of its fiery practical apostles, Condorcet, Mirabeau, Robespierre.[1] The only other illustrious European of this decade was Adam Smith, born in 1723, between whose labours and some of the most remarkable of Turgot's there was so much community. We cannot tell how far the gulf between Turgot and the earlier band was fixed by the accident that he did not belong to their generation in point of time. The accident is in itself only worth attention in connection with his distance from them in other and more important points than time.

The years of Turgot exactly bridge the interval between the ministry of Dubois and that of Calonne; between the despair and confusion of the close of the Regency, and that of the last ten years of the monarchy. In 1727 we stand on the threshold of that far-resounding workshop, where a hundred hands wrought the cunning implements and encyclopaedic engines that were to serve in storming the hated citadels of superstition and injustice. In 1781 we emerge from these subterranean realms into the open air, to find ourselves surrounded by all the sounds and portents of imminent ruin. This, then, is the significance of the date of Turgot's birth.

His stock was Norman, and those who amuse themselves by finding a vital condition of the highest ability in antiquity of blood, may quote the descent of Turgot. His biographers speak

[1] Born in 1748, 1749, and 1759 respectively.

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of one Togut, a Danish prince, who walked the earth some thousand years before the Christian era; and of Saint Turgot in the eleventh century, the Prior of Durham, biographer of Bede, and first minister of Malcolm III. of Scotland. Let us pass over Togut and Saint Turgot; and the founder of a hospital in the thirteenth century; and the great-great-grandfather who sat as president of the Norman nobles in the States-General of 1614, and the grandfather who deserted arms for the toga. History is hardly concerned in this solemn marshalling of shades.

Even with Michel-Étienne, the father of Turgot, we have here no dealing. Let it suffice to say that he held high municipal office in Paris, and performed its duties with exceptional honour and spirit, giving sumptuous fêtes, constructing useful public works, and on one occasion jeoparding his life with a fine intrepidity that did not fail in his son, in appeasing a bloody struggle between two bodies of Swiss and French guards. There is in the library of the British Museum a folio of 1740, containing elaborate plates and letterpress, descriptive of the fêtes celebrated by the city of Paris with Michel-Étienne Turgot as its chief officer, on the occasion of the marriage of Louise-Elizabeth of France to Don Philip of Spain (August 1739). As one contemplates these courtly sumptuosities, La Bruyère's famous picture recurs, of far other scenes in the same gay land. "We see certain wild animals, male and female, scattered over the fields, black, livid, all burnt by the sun, bound to the earth they dig and work with unconquerable pertinacity; they have a sort of articulate voice, and when they rise on their feet, they show a human face; in fact they are men." That these violent and humiliating contrasts are eternal and inevitable, is the last word of the dominant philosophy of society; and one of the

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reasons why Turgot's life is worth studying, is that he felt in so pre-eminent a degree the urgency of lightening the destiny of that wild, hardly articulate, ever-toiling multitude.

The sum of the genealogical page is that Turgot inherited the position that, falling to worthy souls, is of its nature so invaluable, a family tradition of exalted courage and generous public spirit.

Turgot was the third son of his father. As the employments that persons of respectable family could enter were definite and stereotyped, there was little room for debate as to the calling for which a youth should prepare himself. Arms, civil administration, and the church furnished the only three openings for a gentleman. To identify the interests of the richest and most powerful class with the interests of the church, of the army, and of a given system of civil government, was indeed to give to that class the strongest motives for leaving the existing social order undisturbed. It unfortunately went too far in this direction, by fostering the strongest possible motives of hostility to such modifications in these gigantic departments as changing circumstances might make needful, in the breasts of the only men who could produce these modifications without a violent organic revolution. Such a system left too little course to spontaneity. Some of its evil effects were obvious and on the surface. The man who should have been a soldier found himself saying mass and hearing confessions. Vauvenargues, who was born for diplomacy or literature, passed the flower of his days in the organised dreariness of garrisons and marches. The eldest son usually preserved the rank and status of the family, whether civil or military. Turgot's eldest brother was to devote himself to civil administration, the next to be a soldier, and Turgot himself to be an ecclesiastic.

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The second of the brothers, who began by following arms, had as little taste for them as the future minister had for the church. He persuaded the government after the loss of Canada that Guiana, to be called Equinoctial France, would if well governed become some sort of equivalent for the northern possession. He was made Governor-General, but he had forgotten the climate, and the scheme came to an abortive end, involving him in a mass of confused quarrels which lasted some years. He had a marked love for botany, agriculture, and the like; was one of the founders of the Society of Agriculture in 1760; and was the author of various pieces on points of natural history.[1]

Turgot went as a boarder first to the college of Louis-le-Grand, then to that of Plessis; thence to the seminary of Saint-Sulpice, where he took the degree of bachelor in theology; and from Saint-Sulpice to the Sorbonne. His childhood and youth, like those of other men who have afterwards won love and admiration, have their stories. The affection of one biographer records how the pocket-money with which the young Turgot was furnished, used always instantly to disappear, no one knew how or on what. It was discovered that he gave it to poor schoolfellows to enable them to buy books. Condorcet remarks on this, that "goodness and even generosity are not rare sentiments in childhood; but for these sentiments to be guided by such wisdom, this really seems the presage of an extraordinary man, all whose sentiments should be virtues, because they would always be controlled by reason."[2] It is at any rate certain that the union of head and heart, which this story prefigures, was the distinction

[1] Among others, of a little volume still to be met with in libraries, *Sur la manière de préparer les diverses curiosités d'histoire naturelle* (1758).

[2] *Vie de Turgot*, p. 8 (ed. 1847).

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of Turgot's character. It is less pleasant to learn that Turgot throughout his childhood was always repulsed by his mother, who deemed him sullen, because he failed to make his bow with good grace, and was shy and taciturn. He fled from her visitors, and would hide himself behind sofa or screen, until dragged forth for inspection.[1] This is only worth recording, because the same awkwardness and lack of grace remained with Turgot to the end, and had to do with the unpopularity that caused his fall. Perhaps he was thinking of his own childhood, when he wrote that fathers are often indifferent, or incessantly occupied with the details of business, and that he had seen the very parents who taught their children that there is nothing so noble as to make people happy, yet repulse the same children when urging some one's claim to favour, and intimidate their young sensibility, instead of encouraging and training it.[2]

Morellet, one of the best known of the little group of friends and brother-students at the Sorbonne, has recorded other authentic traits. Turgot, he says, united the simplicity of a child to a peculiar dignity that forced the respect of his comrades. His modesty and reserve were those of a girl, and those equivocal references in which the undisciplined animalism of youth often has a stealthy satisfaction, always called the blood to his cheeks and covered him with embarrassment. For all that, his spirit was full of a frank gaiety, and he would indulge in long bursts of laughter at a pleasantry or frolic that struck him. We may be glad to know this, because without express testimony to the contrary, there would have been some reason for suspecting that Turgot was defective in that most wholesome and human quality of a capacity for laughter.

[1] *Mémoires de Morellet*, i. 12 (ed. 1822).
[2] *Lettre à Madame de Graffigny. Œuvres*, ii. 798.

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With the moral quality we have seen, Morellet adds that for the intellectual side Turgot as a boy had a prodigious memory. He could retain as many as a hundred and eighty lines of verse, after hearing them twice, or sometimes even once. He knew by heart most of Voltaire's fugitive pieces, and long passages in his poems and tragedies. His predominant characteristics are described as penetration, and that other valuable faculty to which penetration is an indispensable adjunct, but which it by no means invariably implies—a spirit of broad and systematic co-ordination. The unusual precocity of his intelligence was perhaps imperfectly appreciated by his fellow-students, since it led him so far beyond any point within their sight. It has been said of him that he passed at once from infancy to manhood, and was in the rank of sages before he had shaken off the dust of the playground.

To a certain extent his temperament, which from the earliest hours consumed him with eager desire for knowledge, was the mark of all the best minds of the epoch; from Voltaire downwards, they were inflamed by an inextinguishable and universal curiosity. Voltaire hardly left a single corner of the field entirely unexplored in science, poetry, history, philosophy. Rousseau wrote a comic opera and was an ardent botanist. Diderot wrote well and intelligently *de omni scibili*, and was the author alike of the *Letter on the Blind* and of *Jacques le fataliste*. No era was ever so little the era of the specialist.

The society of the Sorbonne corresponded exactly to a college at one of our universities, and will be distinguished by the careful reader from the faculty of theology in the university, which was usually, but not always, composed of *docteurs de Sorbonne*. It consisted of a large number of

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learned men in the position of fellows, and a smaller number of younger students, who lived together just as our undergraduates do, in separate apartments, but with common hall, library, and garden. One of Turgot's masters, Sigorgne, was the first to teach in the university the Newtonian principles of astronomy, instead of the Cartesian hypothesis of vortices. As is well known, Cartesianism had for various reasons taken a far deeper root in France than it ever did here, and held its place a good generation after Newtonian ideas were accepted and taught at Oxford and Cambridge.[1] Voltaire's translation of the *Principia*, which he was prevented by the Cartesian chancellor, D'Aguesseau, from publishing until 1738, overthrew the reigning system, and gave a strong impulse to scientific inquiry.

Turgot mastered the new doctrine with avidity. In the acute letter of criticism that, while still at the Sorbonne, he addressed to Buffon, he pointedly urged it as the first objection to the writer's theory of the formation and movements of the planets, that any attempt at fundamental explanations of this kind was a departure from "the simplicity and safe reserve of the philosophy of Newton."[2] He only, however, made a certain advance in mathematics. He appears to have had no peculiar or natural aptitude for them, though he is said to have constantly blamed himself for not having gone deeply into the subject. It is hardly to be denied that mathematical and philosophic genius do not always go together. The precision, definiteness, and accurate limitations of the method of the one, are usually unfriendly to the brooding, tentative, uncircumscribed meditation that is the productive humour in

[1] Whewell's *Hist. Induct. Sciences*, ii. 147-159.

[2] *Œuvres de Turgot*, ii. 783. (Edition of Messrs. Eugène Daire and H. Dussard, published in the *Collection des principaux économistes*, published by Guillaumin, 1844.)

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the other. Turgot was essentially of the philosophising temper. Though the activity of his intelligence was incessant, his manner of work was the reverse of quick. "When he applied himself to work," says Morellet, "when it was a question of writing or doing, he was slow and loitering. Slow, because he insisted on finishing all he did perfectly, according to his own conception of perfection, which was most difficult of attainment, even down to the minutest detail; and because he would not receive assistance, being never contented with what he had not done himself. He also loitered a great deal, losing time in arranging his desk and cutting his pens, not that he was not thinking profoundly through all this trifling; but mere thinking did not advance his work." [1]

We know the books that Turgot and his friends devoured with ardour. Locke, Bayle, Voltaire, Buffon, relieved Clarke, Leibnitz, Spinoza, Cudworth; and constant discussions among themselves both cleared up and enlarged what they read.[2] One of the disputants, certainly not the least amiable, has painted his own part in these discussions: "I was violent in discussion," says the good Morellet, as he was pleasantly called, "but without my antagonist being able to reproach me with a single insult; and sometimes I used to spit blood after a debate in which I had not allowed a single personality to escape me." [3]

Another member of the circle was Loménie de Brienne, who, in long years after, was chief minister of France for a narrow space through the momentous winter of 1787 and the spring of the next year, filling the gap between Calonne and Necker in a desperate and fatal style. Loménie's ambition dated from his youth; it was always personal. While Turgot, his friend, was earnestly meditating on the destinies of the race and the conditions of

[1] *Mémoires*, i. 16. [2] *Ibid.* i. 20. [3] *Ibid.* i. 19.

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their development, Loménie was dreaming only of the restoration of his ancestral château of Brienne. Though quite without means, he planned this in his visions on a scale of extreme costliness and magnificence. The dreams fell true. Money came to the family, and the château was built exactly as he had projected it, at a cost of two million francs.[1] His career was splendid. He was clever, industrious, persevering, astute, lively, pretentious, a person ever by well-planned hints leading you to suppose his unrevealed profundity to be bottomless.[2] He espoused that richly dowered bride the church, rose to be Archbishop of Toulouse, and would have risen to be Archbishop of Paris, but for the king's over-scrupulous conviction that "an Archbishop of Paris must at least believe in God." He became an immense favourite with Marie Antoinette and the court, was made minister "like Richelieu and Mazarin," and after having postured and played tricks in face of the bursting deluge, and given the government the final impulse into the abyss of bankruptcy, was dismissed with the rich archbishopric of Sens and a cardinal's hat for himself, and good sinecures for his kinsfolk. His last official act was to send for the 20,000 livres for his month's salary, not fully due. His brother, the Count of Brienne, remained in office as Minister of War. He was a person of no talent, his friends allowed, but "assisted by a good chief clerk, he would have made a good minister; he meant well."

All his honour and glory Loménie de Brienne enjoyed for a season, until the Jacobins laid violent hands upon him. He poisoned himself in his own palace, just as a worse thing was about to befall him. Alas, poetic justice is the exception

[1] Morellet's *Mémoires*, i. 17-21, 262-270; and ii. 15.
[2] Marmontel's *Mémoires*, bk. xiii.; Morellet, however, with persevering friendliness, denies the truth of Marmontel's picture (ii. 465).

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in history, and only once in many generations does the drama of the state criminal rise to an artistic fifth act. This was in 1794. In 1750 a farewell dinner had been given in the rooms of the abbé de Brienne at the Sorbonne, and the friends made an appointment for a game of tennis behind the church of the Sorbonne in the year 1800.[1] The year came, but no Loménie, no Turgot, and the Sorbonne itself had vanished.

When the time arrived for his final acceptance of an ecclesiastical destination, Turgot felt the honourable repugnance that might have been anticipated alike from his morality and his intelligence, to enter into an engagement which would irrevocably bind him for the rest of his life, either always to hold exactly the same opinions, or else to continue to preach them publicly after he had ceased to hold them privately. No certainty of worldly comfort and advantage could in his eyes counterbalance the possible danger and shame of a position, which might place him between the two alternatives of stifling his intelligence and outraging his conscience—the one by blind, unscrutinising, and immovable acceptance of all the dogmas and sentiments of the church; the other by the inculcation as truths of what he believed to be false, and the proscription as falsehoods of what he believed to be true. The horror and disgrace of such a situation were too striking for one who used his mind and acted on principle, to run any risk of that situation becoming his own.

At the close of his course at the Sorbonne, he wrote a letter to his father giving the reasons for this resolution to abandon all idea of an ecclesiastical career and the advancement which it offered him, and seeking his consent for the change from church to law. His father approved of the resolution, and

[1] Morellet, i. 21.

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gave the required consent. As Turgot had studied law as well as theology, no time was lost, and he formally entered the profession of the law as Deputy-Counsellor of the Procureur-Général at the beginning of 1752.

His college friends had remonstrated warmly at this surrender of a brilliant prospect. A little deputation of young abbés, fresh from their vows, waited on him at his rooms; in the humour of blithe and sagacious good-will that comes so naturally to men who believe they have just found out Fortune's trick and yoked her fast for ever to the car, they declared that he was about to do something opposed to his own interest, and inconsistent with his usual good sense. In one profession he would waste his genius in arguing trifling private affairs, while in the other he would be of the highest usefulness to his country, and would acquire the greatest reputation. Turgot, however, insisted on placing genius and reputation below the necessity of being honest. The object of an oath might be of the least important kind, but he could neither allow himself to play with it, nor believe that a man could abase his profession in public opinion, without at the same time abasing himself. "*You shall do as you will,*" he said; "*for my own part, it is impossible for me to wear a mask all my life.*" [1]

We have said that Turgot disdained to fight under a mask. There was one exception, and only one. In 1754 there appeared two letters, nominally from an ecclesiastic to a magistrate, and entitled *Le Conciliateur*. Here it is enough to say that they were intended to enforce the propriety and duty of religious toleration. In a letter to a friend we find Turgot saying, "Although the *Conciliator* is of my principles, and those of our friend, I am astonished at your conjectures; *it is neither his*

[1] Dupont de Nemours. Condorcet's *Vie de Turgot*, pp. 8-10.

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style nor mine."[1] Yet Turgot had written it. This is his one public literary equivocation. Let us, at all events, allow that it was resorted to, not to break the law with safety, nor to cloak a malicious attack on a person, but to give additional weight by means of a harmless prosopopoeia, to an argument for the noblest of principles.[2]

Before Turgot entered the great world, he had already achieved an amount of success in philosophic speculation that placed him in the front rank of social thinkers. To that passion for study and the acquisition of knowledge, not uncommon in youth, and one of the most attractive of youth's qualities, there was added in him what is unhappily not common in men and women of any age—an active impulse to use his own intelligence upon the information he gained from books and professors. He was no conceited or froward caviller at authority, nor born rebel against established teachers and governors. His understanding seriously craved a full and independent satisfaction, and could draw this only from laborious meditation that should either disclose the inadequacy of the grounds for an opinion, or else establish it with what would be to him a new and higher, because an independently acquired, conclusiveness.

His letter to Buffon, to which we have already referred, is an illustration of this wise, and never captious nor ungracious, caution in receiving ideas. Neither Buffon's reputation, nor the glow of his style, nor the dazzling ingenuity and grandeur of his conceptions—all of them so well calculated, at one-and-twenty, to throw even a vigilant intelligence off its guard—could divert Turgot from the prime scientific duty of confronting a

[1] *Œuvres*, ii. 685. Morellet says that it was written by Loménie de Brienne, 19.

[2] See the note of Dupont de Nemours, *ad loc.*

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theory with facts. Buffon was for explaining the formation of the earth and the other planets, and their lateral movement, by the hypothesis that a comet had fallen obliquely on to the sun, driven off certain portions of its constituent matter in a state of fusion, and that these masses, made spherical by the mutual attraction of their parts, were carried to different distances in proportion to their mass and the force originally impressed on them. Buffon may have been actuated, both here and in his other famous hypothesis of reproduction, by a desire, less to propound a true and durable explanation, than to arrest by a bold and comprehensive generalisation that attention which is only imperfectly touched by mere collections of particular facts.[1]

Turgot was less sensible of these possible advantages than he was alive to the certain dangers. He perceived that to hold a theory otherwise than as an inference from facts, is to have a strong motive for looking at the facts in a predetermined light, or for ignoring them; an involuntary predisposition fatal to the discovery of truth, which is nothing more than the conformity of our conception of facts to their adequately observed order. Why, he asks, do you replunge us into the night of hypotheses, justifying the Cartesians and their three elements and their vortices? And whence comes your comet?[2]

Before passing on to more scientific speculations it is worth while to notice Turgot's letter to Madame de Graffigny, both for intrinsic merit and scope of ideas, and for proof of the interest, at once early and profound, that he took in moral questions lying at the very bottom, as well of sound character, as of a healthy society. Turgot's

[1] See Condorcet's Eloge on Buffon (*Œuvres*, iii. 335); and a passage from Bourdon, quoted in Whewell's *Hist. Induct. Sci.* iii. 348.

[2] October 1748. *Œuvres*, ii. 782-784.

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early passion for literature had made him seize an occasion of being introduced to even so moderately renowned a professor of it as Madame de Graffigny. He happened to be intimate with her niece, who afterwards became the lively and witty wife of Helvétius, somewhat to the surprise of Turgot's friends. For although he persuaded Mademoiselle de Ligniville to present him to her aunt, and though he assiduously attended Madame de Graffigny's literary gatherings, Turgot would constantly quit the circle of men of letters for the sake of a game of battledore with the comely and attractive niece. Hence the astonishment of men that from such familiarity there grew no stronger passion, and that whatever the causes of such reserve, the only issue was a tender and lasting friendship.[1]

Madame de Graffigny had begged Turgot's opinion upon the manuscript of a work composed, as so many others were, after the pattern of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*,—now nearly thirty years old,—and bearing the accurately imitative title of *Lettres péruviennes*. A Peruvian comes to Europe, and sends to a friend or mistress in Peru a series of remarks on civilisation. Goldsmith's delightful *Citizen of the World* is the best-known type in our own literature of this primitive form of social criticism. The effect upon common opinion of criticism cast in such a mould, presenting familiar habits, institutions, and observances, in a striking and unusual light, was to give a kind of Socratic stimulus to people's ideas about education, civilisation, conduct, and the other topics springing from a comparison between the manners of one community and another. That one of the two, whether Peru, or China, or Persia, was a community drawn mainly from the imagination, did not render the contrast any the less effective in stirring men's minds.

[1] Morellet, i. 140.

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By the middle of the century the air was full of ideas upon these subjects. The temptation was irresistible to turn from the confusion of squalor, oppression, licence, distorted organisation, penetrative disorder, to ideal states comprising a little range of simple circumstances, and a small number of types of virtuous and unsophisticated character. Much came of the relief thus sought and found. It was the beginning of the subversive process, for it taught men to look away from ideas of practical amelioration. The genius of Rousseau gave these dreams the shape that, in many respects, so unfortunately for France, finally attracted the bulk of the national sentiment and sympathy. But the vivid, humane, and inspiring pages of *Émile* were not published until ten years after Turgot's *Letter to Madame de Graffigny*:[1] a circumstance that may teach us that in moral as in physical discoveries, though one man may take the final step and reap the fame, the conditions have been prepared beforehand.

The reader who remembers Locke's *Thoughts concerning Education* (published in 1690), and the particularly homely prescriptions upon the subjects of the infant body with which that treatise opens, will recognise the source of Turgot's inspiration. The same may be said of the wise passages in this letter, upon the right attitude of a father towards his child. It was not merely the metaphysics of the sage and positive Locke that laid the revolutionary train in France. This influence extended over the whole field, and even Rousseau confesses the obligations of the imaginary governor of Émile to the real Locke.

We are again plainly in the Lockian atmosphere when Turgot speaks of men being the dupes of "general ideas, which are true because drawn from

[1] Written in 1751. *Œuvres*, ii. 785-794.

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nature, but which people embrace with a narrow stiffness that makes them false, because they no longer combine them with circumstances, taking for absolute what is only the expression of a relation." The merit of this and the other educational parts of the piece is not their originality, but the kind of complete and finished assimilation that is all but tantamount to independent thought, and in certain conditions may be much more practically useful.

Not less important to the happiness of men than the manner of their education, is their own cultivation of a wise spirit of tolerance in conduct. "I should like to see explained," Turgot says, "the causes of alienation and disgust between people who love one another. I believe that after living awhile with men, we perceive that bickerings, ill-humours, teasings on trifles, perhaps cause more troubles and divisions among them than serious things. How many bitternesses have their origin in a word, in forgetfulness of some slight observances! If people would only weigh in an exact balance so many little wrongs, if they would only put themselves in the place of those who have to complain of them, if they would only reflect how many times they have themselves given way to humours, how many things they have forgotten! A single word spoken in disparagement of our intelligence is enough to make us irreconcilable, and yet how often have we been deceived in the very same matter. How many persons of understanding have we taken for fools! Why should not others have the same privilege as ourselves? . . . Ah, what address is needed to live together, to be compliant without cringing, to expose a fault without harshness, to correct without imperious air, to remonstrate without ill-temper!" All wise and good, but, as Turgot had occasion by and by to say, little comes of giving rules instead of breeding habits.

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We may notice too in this Letter, what so many of Turgot's allies and friends were disposed to complain of, but what will commend him to a less newly emancipated and therefore a less fanatical generation. There is a conspicuous absence of that peculiar boundlessness of hope, that zealous impatience for the instant realisation and fruition of all the aspirations of philosophic intelligence, which carried others immediately around him so excessively far in the creed of Perfectibility. "Liberty! I answer with a sigh, maybe that men are not worthy of thee! Equality! They would yearn after thee, but cannot attain!" Compared with the confident exultation and illimitable sense of the worth of man which distinguished that time, there is something like depression here, as in many other places in Turgot's writings. It is usually less articulate, and rather conveyed by a running undertone that so often reveals more of a writer's true mood and temper than is seen in his words, giving to them, by some unconscious and inscrutable process, living effects upon the reader's sense like those of eye and voice and accompanying gesture.

Dejection, however, is not the proper word for the humour of reserved and grave suspense, natural in those rare spirits who have recognised how narrow is the way of truth and how few there be that enter therein, and what prolonged concurrence of favouring hazards with gigantic endeavour is needed for each smallest step in the halting advancement of the race. With Turgot this was not the result of mere sentimental brooding. It had a deliberate and reasoned foundation in historical study. He was patient and not hastily sanguine as to the speedy coming of the millennial future, exactly because history had taught him to measure the laggard paces of the past. The secret of the intense hopefulness

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of that time lay in the mournfully erroneous conviction that the one condition of progress is plenteous increase of light. Turgot saw very early that this is not so. "*It is not error*," he wrote, in a saying that every champion of a new idea should have ever in letters of flame before his eyes, "*that opposes the progress of truth: it is indolence, obstinacy, the spirit of routine, everything that favours inaction.*" [1]

The others left these potent elements of obstruction out of calculation and account. With Turgot they were the main facts to be considered, and the main forces to be counteracted. It is the mark of the highest kind of union between sagacious, firm, and clear-sighted intelligence, and a warm and steadfast glow of social feeling, when a man has learnt how little the effort of the individual can do either to hasten or to direct the current of human destiny, and yet finds in effort his purest pleasure and his most constant duty. If we owe honour to the social endeavour that is stimulated and sustained by an enthusiastic confidence in speedy and full fruition, we surely owe it still more to those who, knowing how remote and precarious and long beyond their own days is the hour of fruit, yet need no other spur nor sustenance than bare hope, and in this strive and endeavour, and still endeavour. It was the possession of this strength and the constant call and strain upon it, that gave Turgot in mien and speech a gravity that revolted the frivolous or indifferent, and seemed cold and timorous to the enthusiastic and urgent.

II

In 1750 Turgot, then only in his twenty-fourth year, was appointed to the honorary office of Prior

[1] *Œuvres*, ii. 672.

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of the Sorbonne, an elective distinction conferred annually, as it appears, on some meritorious or highly-connected student. It was held in the following year by Loménie de Brienne. In this capacity Turgot read two Latin dissertations, one at the opening of the session, and the other at its close. The first of these was upon "The Advantages that the Establishment of Christianity has conferred upon the Human Race."

Its value, as might well have been expected from the circumstances of its production, is not very high. It is pitched in a tone of exaltation that is eminently unfavourable to the permanently profitable treatment of so vast a subject. There are in it too many of those eloquent and familiar commonplaces of orthodox history, by which the doubter tries to warm himself into belief, and the believer dreams that he is corroborating faith by reason. The assembly for whom his discourse was prepared, could hardly have endured the apparition in the midst of them of what both rigorous justice and accurate history required to have taken into account on the other side. It was not to be expected that a young student within the precincts of the Sorbonne should have any eyes for the evil with which the forms of the Christian religion, like other growths of the human mind, from the lowest forms of savage animism upwards, have ever alloyed its good. The absence of all reference to one half of what the annals of the various Christian churches have to teach us, robs the first of Turgot's Discourses of the serious and durable quality which belongs to his other writings.

The same vicious exclusiveness was practised by the enemies of the church, and if history was to one of the two contending factions an exaggerated enumeration of the blessings of Christianity, it

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was to their passionate rivals only a monotonous catalogue of curses. Of this temper we have a curious illustration in the circumstance that Dupont, Turgot's intimate friend of later years, who collected and published his works, actually took the trouble to suppress the opening of this very Discourse, in which Turgot had replied to the reproach often made against Christianity, of being useful only for a future life.[1]

In the first Discourse, Turgot considers the influence of Christianity first upon human nature, and secondly on political societies. One feature at least deserves remark, and this is that, in spite both of a settled partiality and of a certain amount of the common form of theology, yet at bottom and putting some phrases apart, religion is handled, and its workings traced, much as they would have been if treated as admittedly secular forces. And this was something. Let us proceed to analyse what Turgot says.

1. Before the preaching and acceptance of the new faith, all nations alike were plunged into the most extravagant superstitions. The most frightful dissoluteness of manners was encouraged by the example of the gods themselves. Every passion and nearly every vice was the object of a monstrous deification. A handful of philosophers existed, who had learnt no better lesson from their reason than to despise the multitude of their fellows. In the midst of the universal contagion the Jews alone remained pure. Even the Jews were affected with a narrow and sterile pride, that proved how little they appreciated the priceless treasure entrusted to their keeping. What were the effects of the appearance of Christ, and the revelation of the gospel? It inspired men with a tender zeal for the truth, and by establishing the necessity of a body of teachers for the instruction

[1] *Œuvres*, ii. 586 *n*.

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of nations, made studiousness and intellectual application indispensable in a great number of persons.

Consider, again, the obscurity, incertitude, and incongruousness, that marked the ideas of the wisest of the ancients upon the nature of man and of God, and the origin of creation; the Ideas of Plato, for instance, the Numbers of Pythagoras, the theurgic extravagances of Plotinus and Porphyry and Iamblichus; and then measure the contributions made by the scholastic theologians whose dry method has undergone so much severe condemnation, to the instruments by which knowledge is enlarged and made accurate. It was the church, moreover, that civilised the northern barbarians, and so preserved the West from the same barbarism and desolation with which the triumphs of Mahometanism replaced the knowledge and arts and prosperity of the East. It is to the services of the church that we owe the perpetuation of a knowledge of the ancient tongues, and if this knowledge, and the possession of the masterpieces of thought and feeling and form, the flower of the ancient European mind, remained so long unproductive, still religious organisation deserves our gratitude equally for keeping these great treasures for happier times. They survived, as trees stripped by winter of their leaves survive through frost and storm, to give new blossoms in a new spring.

This much on the intellectual side; but how can we describe the moral transformation which the new faith brought to pass? Men who had hitherto only regarded gods as beings to be entreated to avert ill or bestow blessing, now learnt the nobler emotion of devout love for a divinity of supreme power and beneficence. The new faith, besides kindling love for God, inflamed the kindred sentiment of love for men, all of whom it declared to be

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the children of God, one vast family with a common father. Julian himself bore witness to the fidelity with which the Christians, whose faith he hated or despised, tended the sick and fed the poor, not only of their own association, but those also who were without the fold. The horrible practice of exposing new-born infants, which outraged nature, and yet did not touch the heart nor the understanding of a Numa, an Aristotle, a Confucius, was first proscribed by the holy religion of Christ. If shame and misery still sometimes, in the hearts of poor outcast mothers, overpower the horror that Christianity first inspired, the same religion has opened sheltering places for the unhappy victims of such a practice, and provided means for rearing foundlings into useful citizens.

Christian teaching, by reviving the principles of sensibility within the breast, may be said "to have in some sort unveiled human nature to herself." If the cruelty of old manners has abated, do we not owe the improvement to such courageous priests as Ambrose, who refused admission into the church to Theodosius, because in punishing a guilty city he had hearkened to the voice rather of wrath than of justice; or as that Pope who insisted that Louis the Seventh should expiate by a rigorous penance the sack and burning of Vitry?[1] It is not to a Titus, a Trajanus, an Antoninus, that we owe the abolition of the bloody gladiatorial games; it is to Jesus Christ. Virtuous unbelievers have not seldom been the apostles of benevolence and humanity, but we rarely see them in the asylums of misery. Reason speaks, but it is religion that makes men act. How much dearer to us than the splendid monuments of antique taste, power, and greatness, are those Gothic edifices reared for the poor and the orphan, those far nobler monuments of the piety of Christian

[1] See Martin's *Hist. de la France*, iii. 422. Or Morison's *Life of Saint Bernard*, bk. iii. ch. vi.

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princes and the power of Christian faith. The rudeness of their architecture may wound the delicacy of our taste, but they will be ever beloved by feeling hearts. "Let others admire in the retreat prepared for those who have sacrificed in battle their lives or their health for the state, all the gathered riches of the arts, displaying in the eyes of all the nations the magnificence of Louis the Fourteenth, and carrying our renown to the level of that of Greece and Rome. What I will admire is such a use of those arts; the sublime glory of serving the weal of men raises them higher than they had ever been at Rome or at Athens."

2. Let us turn from the action of the Christian faith in modifying the passions of the individual, to its influence upon societies of men. How has Christianity ameliorated the art of government, with reference to the two characteristic aims of that art, the happiness of communities, and their stability? "Nature has given all men the right of being happy," but the old lawgivers abandoned nature's wise economy, by which she uses the desires and interests of individuals to fulfil her general plans and ensure the common weal. Men like Lycurgus destroyed all idea of property, violated the laws of modesty, and annihilated the tenderest ties of blood. A false and mischievous spirit of system seduced them away from the true method, the feeling after experience.[1] A general injustice reigned in the laws of all nations; among all of them what was called the public good was confined to a small number of men. Love of country was less the love of fellow-citizens than a common hatred towards strangers. Hence the barbarities practised by the ancients upon their slaves, hence that custom of slavery once spread over the whole earth, those horrible cruelties in the wars of the

[1] *Les hommes en tout ne s'éclairent que par le tâtonnement de l'expérience.* *Œuvres*, ii. 593.

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Greeks and the Romans, that barbarous inequality between the two sexes which still reigns in the East; hence the tyranny of the great towards the common people in hereditary aristocracies, the profound degradation of subject peoples. In short, everywhere the stronger have made the laws and have crushed the weak; and if they have sometimes consulted the interests of a given society, they have always forgotten those of the human race. To recall right and justice, a principle was necessary that could raise men above themselves and all around them, that could lead them to survey all nations and all conditions with an equitable gaze, and in some sort with the eyes of God himself. This is what religion has done. What other principle could have fought and vanquished both interests and prejudice united?

If the history of the ancient republics shows that they hardly knew the difference between liberty and anarchy, and if even Aristotle seemed unable to reconcile monarchy with a mild government, is not the reason to be found in the fact that, before the Christian era, the various governments of the world only presented either an ambition without bound or limit, or else a blind passion for independence? a perpetual balance between oppression on the one side, and revolt on the other? In vain did lawgivers attempt to arrest this incessant struggle of conflicting passions by laws too weak for the purpose, because in too imperfect an accord with opinions and manners. Religion, by placing man under the eyes of an all-seeing God, imposed on human passions the only rein capable of effectually bridling them. It gave men internal laws, that were stronger than all the external bonds of the civil laws. By means of this internal change, it has everywhere had the effect of weakening despotism, so that the limits of Christianity seem to mark also the limits of mild government and public felicity.

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Kings saw the supreme tribunal of a God who should judge them and the cause of their people. Thus the distance between them and their subjects became as nothing in the infinite distance between kings and subjects alike, and the divinity that was equally elevated above either. They were both in some sort equalised by a common abasement. "Ye nations, be subject to authority," cried the voice of religion to the one; and to the other it cried, "Ye kings, who judge the earth, learn that God has only entrusted you with the image of power for the happiness of your peoples."

An eloquent description of the efficacy of Christianity in raising human nature, and impressing on kings the obligation of pursuing above all things the well-being of their subjects, closes with a courtly official salutation of the virtues of that Very Christian King, Louis the Fifteenth.

"It is ill reasoning against religion," an illustrious contemporary of Turgot's had said, in a deprecatory sentence that serves to mark the spirit of the time, "to compile a long list of the evils it has inflicted, without doing the same for the blessings it has bestowed."[1] Conversely we may well think it unphilosophical and unconvincing to enumerate all the blessings without any of the evils; to tell us how the Christian doctrine enlarged the human spirit, without observing what narrowing limitations it imposed; to dwell on all the mitigating influences with which the Christian churches have been associated, while forgetting all the ferocities they have inspired. The history of European belief offers a double record since the decay of polytheism, and if for a certain number of centuries this record shows the civilisation of men's instincts by Christianity, it reveals to us in the centuries subsequent, the reverse process of the civilisation of Christianity by

[1] *Esprit des lois*, bk. xxiv. ch. ii.

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men's instincts. Turgot's piece treats half the subject as if it were the whole. He extends down to the middle of the eighteenth century a number of propositions and implied inferences that are only true up to the beginning of the fourteenth.

We now know how this long battle between the champions of authority and the leaders of revolt, which Turgot watched, but of which he did not see the end, has gone. The churchmen lost their lead, and were thrown back out of the civil and political sphere. We know, too, what effect these blows to the Catholic organisation have had upon the activity of the Catholic idea. With the decline and extermination of the predominance of churchmen in civil affairs, there began a tendency that has since become deeper and stronger, in the church to withdraw herself and her sons from a sphere where she could no longer be sovereign. This return of the leaders of the Christian society upon the original conceptions of the Christian faith, did not come to pass in Turgot's time.

We may say, in fine, that if this first public composition of Turgot's is imperfect, it was better to exaggerate the services of Christianity, alike as an internal faith and as a peculiar form of social organisation, than to describe Gregory the Great and Innocent, Hildebrand and Bernard, as artful and vulgar tyrants, and Aquinas and Roger Bacon as the products of a purely barbarous, stationary, and dark age. There is at first sight something surprising in the respect that Turgot's ablest contemporaries paid to the contributions made to progress by Greece and Rome, compared with their angry disparagement of the Dark Ages. The reason of this contrast we soon discover to be that the passions of present contests gave their own colour to men's interpretation of the circumstances of the remote middle time between the Roman Empire and the commencement of the revolutionary period.

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Turgot escaped these passions more completely than any man of his time who was elevated enough to be endowed with the capacity for passion. He never forgot that it is as wise and just to confess the obligations of mankind to the Catholic monotheism of the West, as it is shallow and unjust in professors of Christianity to despise or hate the lower theological systems that guide the humbler families of mankind.

Let us observe that only three years after this academic discourse in praise of the religion of the time, Turgot was declaring that "the greatest of the services of Christianity to the world was that it had both enlightened and propagated *natural religion*." [1]

III

The second and more famous of the two Discourses at the Sorbonne was read in December 1750, and professes to treat the "Successive Advances of the Human Mind." [2] The opening lines are among the most pregnant, as they were among the most original, in the history of literature, and reveal in an outline, standing clear against the light, a thought which revolutionised old methods of viewing and describing the course of human affairs, and contained the germs of a new and most fruitful philosophy of society.

"The phenomena of nature, subjected as they are to constant laws, are enclosed in a circle of revolutions that remain the same for ever. All comes to life again, all perishes again; and in these successive generations, by which vegetables and animals reproduce themselves, time does no more than bring back at each moment the image of what it has just dismissed.

"The succession of men, on the contrary, offers

[1] *Lettres sur la tolérance*, II. vol. ii. 687.
[2] *Sur les progrès successifs de l'esprit humain. Œuvres*, ii. 597-611.

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from age to age a spectacle of continual variations. Reason, freedom, the passions, are incessantly producing new events. *All epochs are fastened together by a sequence of causes and effects, linking the condition of the world to all the conditions that have gone before it.* The gradually multiplied signs of speech and writing, giving men an instrument for making sure of the continued possession of their ideas, as well as of imparting them to others, have formed out of the knowledge of each individual a common treasure, which generation transmits to generation, as an inheritance constantly augmented by the discoveries of each age; and the human race, observed from its first beginning, seems in the eyes of the philosopher to be one vast whole, which, like each individual in it, has its infancy and its growth."

This was not a mere casual reflection in Turgot's mind, taking a solitary and separate position among those various and unordered ideas that spring up and go on existing without visible fruit in every active intelligence. It was one of the systematic conceptions that shape and rule many groups of facts, fixing a new and high place of their own for them among the great divisions of knowledge. In a word, it belonged to the rare order of truly creative ideas, and was the root or germ of a whole body of vigorous and connected thought. This quality marks the distinction, in respect of the treatment of history, between Turgot and both Bossuet and the great writers of history in France and England in the eighteenth century. Many of the sayings to which we are referred for the origin of the modern idea of history, such as Pascal's, for instance, are the fortuitous glimpses of men of genius into a vast sea, whose extent they have not been led to suspect, and only make a passing and momentary mark. Bossuet's talk of universal history, that has been so constantly applauded, was fundamentally, and in substance, no more than a

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theological commonplace splendidly decorated. He did indeed speak of "the concatenation of human affairs," but only in the same sentence with "the sequence of the counsels of God." The gorgeous rhetorician of the church was not likely to rise philosophically into the larger air of universal history, properly so called. His merit is that he did in a small and rhetorical way, what Montesquieu and Voltaire afterwards did in a truly comprehensive and philosophical way; he pressed forward general ideas in connection with the recorded movements of the chief races of mankind. For a teacher of history to leave the bare chronicler's road so far as to declare, for example, the general principle, inadequate and over-stated as it may be, that "religion and civil government are the two points on which human things revolve,"—even this was a clear step in advance. The dismissal of the long series of emperors from Augustus to Alexander Severus in two or three pages was to show historic proportion. Again, Bossuet's expressions of "the concatenation of the universe," of the interdependence of the parts of so vast a whole, of there coming no great change without having its causes in foregoing centuries, and of the true object of history being to observe, in connection with each epoch, those secret dispositions of events that prepared the way for great changes, as well as the momentous conjunctures which more immediately brought them to pass[1]—all these phrases point to a true and philosophic survey. But they end in themselves. The chain is an arbitrary and one-sided collection of facts. The writer does not follow and feel after the successive links, but forges and chooses and arrays them after a pattern of his own, that was fixed independently of them. A scientific term or two is not enough to disguise the purely theological essence of the treatise.

Montesquieu and Voltaire were both far enough

[1] *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, part iii. ch. ii.

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removed from Bossuet's point of view, and the *Spirit of Laws* of the one, and the *Essay on the Manners and Character of Nations* of the other, mark a very different way of considering history from the lofty and confident method of the great divine. The *Spirit of Laws* was published in 1748, that is to say a couple of years before Turgot's Discourse at the Sorbonne. Voltaire's *Essay on Manners* did not come out until 1757, or seven years later than the Discourse; but Voltaire himself has told us that its composition dates from 1740, when he prepared this new presentation of European history for the service of Madame du Châtelet.[1] We may hence fairly consider the cardinal work of Montesquieu, and the cardinal historical work of Voltaire, as virtually belonging to the same time. And they possess a leading character in common that separates them both from Turgot. In a word, Montesquieu and Voltaire, if we have to search their most distinctive quality, introduced into history systematically, and with full and decisive effect, a broad generality of treatment. They grouped the facts of history; and they did not group them locally or in accordance with mere geographical or chronological division, but collected the facts in social classes and orders from many countries and times. Their work was a classification. It showed the possibility of arranging the manifold and complex facts of society, and of the movements of communities, under heads and with reference to definite general conditions.

There is no need here to enter into any criticism of Montesquieu, how far the merits of his execution equalled the merit of his design, how far his vicious confusion of the senses of the word "law" impaired the worth of his book, as a contribution to inductive or comparative history. We have only to seek the difference between the philosophic

[1] Preface to *Essai sur les mœurs*. *Œuvres*, xx.

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conception of Montesquieu and the philosophic conception of Turgot. The latter may be considered a more liberal completion of the former. Turgot not only sees the operation of law in the movements and institutions of society, but he interprets this law in a positive and scientific sense, as an ascertainable succession of social states, each of them being the cause and effect of other social states. He gives its deserved prominence to the fertile idea of there being an ordered movement of growth or advance among societies; in other words, of the civilisation of any given portion of mankind having fixed conditions analogous to those of a physical organism. Finally, he does not limit his thought by fixing it upon the laws and constitutions only of countries, but refers historical philosophy to its veritable and widest object and concern, the steps and conditions of the progression of the human mind.

How, he inquires, can we seize the thread of the progress of the human mind? How trace the road, now overgrown and half-hidden, along which the race has travelled? Two ideas suggest themselves, that lay foundations for this inquiry. For one thing, the resources of nature and the fruitful germ of all sorts of knowledge are to be found wherever men are to be found. "The sublimest attainments are not, and cannot be, other than the first ideas of sense developed or combined, just as the edifice whose height most amazes the eye, of necessity reposes on the very earth that we tread; and the same senses, the same organs, the spectacle of the same universe, have everywhere given men the same ideas, as the same needs and the same dispositions have everywhere taught them the same arts." Or it might be put in other words. There is identity in human nature, and repetition in surrounding circumstance means the reproduction of social consequences. For another thing, "the

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actual state of the universe, by presenting at the same moment on the earth all the shades of barbarism and civilisation, discloses to us as in a single glance the monuments, the footprints of all the steps of the human mind, the measure of the whole track along which it has passed, the history of all the ages."

The progress of the human mind means to Turgot the progress of knowledge. Its history is the history of the growth and spread of science and the arts. Its advance is increased enlightenment of the understanding. From Adam and Eve down to Louis the Fourteenth, the record of progress is the chronicle of the ever-increasing additions to the sum of what men know, and the accuracy and fulness with which they know. The chief instrument in this enlightenment is the rising up from time to time of some lofty and superior intelligence; for though human character contains everywhere the same principle, yet certain minds are endowed with a peculiar abundance of talent that is refused to others. "Circumstances develop these superior talents, or leave them buried in obscurity; and from the infinite variety of these circumstances springs the inequality among nations." The agricultural stage goes immediately before a decisively polished state, because it is then first that there is that surplus of means of subsistence which allows men of higher capacity the leisure for using it in the acquisition of knowledge, properly so called.

One of the greatest steps was the precious invention of writing, and one of the most rapid was the constitution of mathematical knowledge. The sciences that came next matured more slowly, because in mathematics the explorer has only to compare ideas among one another, while in the others he has to test the conformity of ideas to objective facts. Mathematical truths, becoming more numerous every day, and increasingly fruitful

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in proportion, lead to the development of hypotheses at once more extensive and more exact, and point to new experiments, that in their turn furnish new problems to solve. "So necessity perfects the instrument; so mathematics finds support in physics, to which it lends its lamp; so all knowledge is bound together; so, notwithstanding the diversity of their advance, all the sciences lend one another mutual aid; and so, by force of feeling a way, of multiplying systems, of exhausting errors, so to speak, the world at length arrives at the knowledge of a vast number of truths." It might seem as if a prodigious confusion, as of tongues, would arise from so enormous an advance along so many lines. "The different sciences, originally confined within a few simple notions common to all, can now, after their advance into more extensive and difficult ideas, only be surveyed apart. But an advance, greater still, brings them together again, because that mutual dependence of all truths is discovered, which, while it links them one to another, throws light on one by another."

Alas, the history of opinion is, in one of its most extensive branches, the history of error. The senses are the single source of our ideas, and furnish its models to the imagination. Hence the nearly incorrigible disposition to judge what we are ignorant of by what we know; hence the deceptive analogies to which the primitive rudeness of men surrenders itself. "*As they watched nature, as their eyes wandered to the surface of a profound ocean, instead of the far-off bed hidden under the waters, they saw nothing but their own likeness.* Every object in nature had its god, and this god formed after the pattern of men had men's attributes and men's vices."[1] Here, in anthropomorphism, or the transfer of human quality to things not human, and the invention of spiritual existences to be the

[1] *Œuvres*, i. 601.

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recipients of this quality, Turgot justly touched the root of most of the wrong thinking that has been as a manacle to science.

His admiration for those epochs in which new truths were most successfully discovered, and old fallacies most signally routed, did not prevent Turgot from appreciating the ages of criticism and their services to knowledge. He does full justice to Alexandria, not only for its astronomy and geometry, but for that peculiar studiousness "that exercises itself less on things than on books; whose strength lies less in producing and discovering, than in collecting and comparing and estimating what has been produced and discovered; that does not press forward, but gazes backward along the road that has already been traversed. The studies that require most genius, are not always those implying most progress in the mass of men. There are minds to which nature has given a memory capable of comparing truths, of suggesting an arrangement that places these truths in the fullest light; but to which, at the same time, she has refused the ardour of genius that insists on inventing and opening out for itself new lines of discovery. Made to unite former discoveries under a single point of view, to surround them with light, and to exhibit them in entire perfection, if they are not luminaries that burn and sparkle of themselves, at least they are like diamonds that reflect with dazzling brilliance a borrowed light."

Thus Turgot's conception of progress regards it mainly, if not entirely, as a gradual dawn and diffusion of light, the spreading abroad of the rays of knowledge. He does not assert, as some moderns have asserted, that morality is of the nature of a fixed quantity; still he hints something of the kind. "Morality," he says, speaking of Greece in the time of its early physical speculation, "though still imperfect, still kept fewer relics of the infancy

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of reason. Those ever-springing necessities that so incessantly recall man to society, and force him to bend to its laws; the instinct, the sentiment of what is good and right, which Providence has engraved in all hearts, and which precedes reason, all lead the thinkers of every time back to the same fundamental principles of the science of morals."

We meet with this limitation of the idea of progress in every member of the school to which more than to any other, Turgot belonged. Even in the vindication of the claims of Christianity to the gratitude of mankind, he had forborne from laying stress on any original contribution supposed to be made by that religion to the precious stock of ethical ideas. He dwells upon the "tender zeal for the progress of truth that the Christian religion inspired," and recounts the various circumstances in which it spread and promoted the social and political conditions most favourable to intellectual or scientific activity. Whatever may be the truth or the value of Christianity as a dogmatic system, there can be little doubt that its weight as a historic force is to be looked for, not so much in the encouragement it gave to science and learning, in respect of which western Europe probably owes more to Mahometanism, as in the high and generous types of character it inspired. A man of rare moral depth, warmth, or delicacy, may be a more important element in the advance of civilisation, than the newest and truest deduction from what Turgot calls "the fundamental principles of the science of morals." The leading of souls to do what is right and humane, is always more urgent than mere instruction of the intelligence as to what exactly is the right and the humane. The saint after all has a place in positive history; the men of the eighteenth century passionately threw him out from their calendar, as the wooden idol of superstition.

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IV

In 1761, Turgot, then in his thirty-fourth year, was appointed to the office of Intendant in the Generality of Limoges. There were three different divisions of France in the eighteenth century: first and oldest, the diocese or ecclesiastical circumscription; second, the province or military government; and third, the Generality, a district defined for fiscal and administrative purposes. The Intendant in the government was very much what the Prefect is in the government of our own time. Perhaps, however, we understand Turgot's position in Limousin best by comparing it to that of the Chief Commissioner of a great district in our Indian Empire. For example, the first task that Turgot had to perform was to execute a new land-assessment for purposes of imperial revenue. He had to construct roads, to build barracks, to administer justice, to deal with a famine, just as the English civilian has to do in Orissa or Behar. Much of his time was taken up in elaborate memorials to the central government, and the desk of the Controller-General at Versailles was loaded with minutes and reports exactly like the voluminous papers that fill the mahogany boxes of Members of Council at Calcutta. The fundamental conditions of the two systems of government were much alike; absolute political authority, and an elaborately centralised civil administration for keeping order and raising a revenue. The direct authority of an Intendant was not considerable. His chief functions were the settlement of detail in executing the general orders that he received from the minister; a provisional decision on certain kinds of minor affairs; and a power of judging some civil suits, subject to appeal to the Council.

Of all the thirty-two great districts in which

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the Intendant stood between the common people and the minister at Versailles, the Generality of Limoges was the poorest, the rudest, the most backward, and the most miserable. To the eye of the traveller with a mind for the picturesque, there were parts of this central region of France whose smiling undulations, delicious water-scenes, deep glens extending into amphitheatres, and slopes hung with woods of chestnut, all seemed to make a lovelier picture than the cheerful beauty of prosperous Normandy, or the olive-groves and orange-gardens of Provence. Arthur Young thought the Limousin the most beautiful part of France. Unhappily for the cultivator, these gracious conformations belonged to a harsh and churlish soil. For him the roll of the chalk and the massing of the granite would have been well exchanged for the fat loams of Picardy. The soil of the Limousin was declared by its inhabitants to be the most ungrateful in the whole kingdom, returning no more than four net for one of seed sown, while there was land in the vale of the Garonne that returned thirty-fold. The two conditions for raising tolerable crops were abundance of labour and abundance of manure. But misery drove the men away, and the stock were sold to pay the taxes. So the land lacked both the arms of the tiller, and the dressing whose generous chemistry would have transmuted the dull earth into fruitfulness and plenty. The extent of the district was estimated at a million and a half hectares, equivalent to nearly four millions of English acres: yet the population of this vast tract was only five hundred thousand souls.

The common food of the people was the chestnut, and to the great majority of them even the coarsest rye-bread was a luxury that they had never tasted. Maize and buckwheat were their

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chief cereals, and these, together with a coarse radish, took up hundreds of acres that might under a happier system have produced fine wheat and nourished fruit-trees. There had once been a certain export of cattle, but that had now come to an end, partly because the general decline of the district had impaired the quality of the beasts, and partly because the Parisian butchers, who were by much the greatest customers, had found the markets of Normandy more convenient. The more the trade went down, the heavier was the burden of the cattle-tax on the stock that remained. The stock-dealer was thus ruined from both sides. In the same way, the Limousin horses, whose breed had been famous all over France, had ceased to be an object of commerce, and the progressive increase of taxation had gradually extinguished the trade. Angoumois, which formed part of the Generality of Limoges, had previously boasted of producing the best and finest paper in the world, and it had found a market not only throughout France, but all over Europe. There had been a time when this manufacture supported sixty mills; at the death of Louis XIV. their number had fallen from sixty to sixteen. An excise duty at the mill, a duty on exportation at the provincial frontier, a duty on the importation of rags over the provincial frontier,—all these vexations had reduced the trade with Holland, one of France's best customers, to one-fourth of its previous dimensions. Nor were paper and cattle the only branches of trade blighted by fiscal perversity. The same burden arrested the transport of saffron across the borders of the province, on its way to Hungary and Prussia and the other cold lands where saffron was a favourite condiment. Salt, which came up the Charente from the marshes by the coast, was stripped of all its profit, first by the duty paid on crossing from the Limousin

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to Périgord and Auvergne, and next by the right possessed by certain of the great lords on the banks of the Charente, to help themselves at one point and another to portions of the cargo. Iron was subject to a harassing excise in all those parts of the country beyond the jurisdiction of the parlement of Bordeaux. The effect of such positive hindrances as these to the transit of goods was further aided, to the destruction of trade, by the absence of roads. There were four roads in the province, but all of them so bad that the traveller knew not whether to curse more lustily the rocks or the swamps that interrupted his journey alternately. There were two rivers, the Vienne and the Vézère, and these might seem to an enthusiast for the argument from Design, as if Nature had intended them for the transport of timber from the immense forests that crowned the Limousin hills. Unluckily, their beds were so thickly bestrewn with rocks that neither of them was navigable for any considerable part of its long course through the ill-starred province.

The inhabitants were as cheerless as the land on which they lived. They had none of the fiery energy, the eloquence, the mobility of the people of the south. Still less were they endowed with the apt intelligence, the ease, the social amiability, the openness, of their neighbours on the north. "The dwellers in Upper Limousin," said one who knew them, "are coarse and heavy, jealous, distrustful, avaricious." The dwellers in Lower Limousin had a less repulsive address, but they were at least as narrowly self-interested at heart, and they added a capacity for tenacious and vindictive hatred. The Limousins had the superstitious doctrines of other semi-barbarous populations, and they had their vices. They passed abruptly and without remorse from a penitential procession to the tavern and the brothel. Their

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Christianity was as superficial as that of the peasant of the Eifel in our own day, or of the Finnish converts of whom we are told that they are even now not beyond sacrificing a foal in honour of the Virgin Mary. Saint Martial and Saint Leonard were the patron saints of the country, and were the objects of an adoration in comparison with which the other saints fell into a secondary place.

They were deeply superstitious, violent in their prejudices, obstinate withstanders of all novelty, rude, hardly redeeming a narrow and blinding covetousness by stubborn industry. Their country has been fixed upon as the cradle of Celtic nationality in France, and there are some who believe that here the old Gaulish blood kept itself purer from external admixture than anywhere else in the land. In our own day, when an orator has occasion to pay a compliment to the townsmen of Limoges, he says that the genius of the people of the district has ever been faithful to its source; it has ever held the balance true between the Frank tradition of the north, and the Roman tradition of the south. This makes an excellent period for a rhetorician, but the fact it conveys made Limousin the severer task for an administrator. Almost immediately after his appointment, Turgot had the chance of being removed to Rouen, and after that to Lyons. Either of these promotions would have had the advantages of a considerable increase of income, less laborious duties, and a much more agreeable residence. Turgot, with a sense of duty that probably seemed quixotic enough to the Controller-General, declined the preferment, on the very ground of the difficulty and importance of the task that he had already undertaken. "*Poor peasants, poor kingdom!*" had been Quesnay's constant exclamation, and it had sunk deep into the spirit of his disciple. He could have little thought of high salary or personal ease when he

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discerned an opportunity of improving the hard lot of the peasant, and softening the misfortunes of the realm.

Turgot was one of the men to whom good government is a religion. It might be said to be the religion of all the best men of that century, and this was natural. The decay of a theology that places our deepest solicitudes in a sphere beyond this, is naturally accompanied by a transfer of these high solicitudes to a nearer scene. But though the desire for good government, and a right sense of its cardinal importance, were common ideas of the time in all the best heads from Voltaire downwards, yet Turgot had a patience that in them was wanting. Though he respected the writings of Rousseau and confessed his obligations to them, Turgot abhorred declamation. He had no hope of clearing society of the intellectual and moral débris of ages at a stroke. Nor had he abstract standards of human bliss. The keyword to his political theory was not Pity nor Benevolence, but Justice. "We are sure to go wrong," he said once, when pressed to confer some advantage on the poor at the cost of the rich, "the moment we forget that *justice alone can keep the balance true among all rights and all interests.*"

As everybody knows, the great fiscal grievance of old France was the *taille*, a tax raised on property and income, but only on the property and income of the unprivileged classes. In the Limousin Turgot's predecessor tried to substitute, for the arbitrary *taille*, a tax systematically assessed in proportion to the amount of the person's property. Such a design involved a complete remeasurement and revaluation of all the land of the Generality, and that was a task of immense magnitude and difficulty. It was very imperfectly performed, and Turgot found a province groaning under a mass of fiscal anomalies and disorders.

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Assessment, collection, exemption, were all alike conducted without definite principles or uniform system. Besides these abuses, the total sum demanded from the Generality by the royal government was greatly in excess of the local resources. The district was heavily overcharged, relatively to other districts around it. No deduction had been made from the sum exacted by the treasury, though the falling off in prosperity was great and notorious. Turgot computed that "the king's share" was as large as that of the proprietors; in other words, taxation absorbed one half of the net products of the land. The government listened to these representations, and conceded to the Generality about half of the remissions that Turgot had solicited. A greater operation was the readjustment of the burden, thus lightened, within the province. The people were so irritated by the disorders introduced by the imperfect operation of the proportional *taille* that, with the characteristic impatience of a rude and unintelligent population, they were heedlessly crying out for a return to the more familiar, and therefore more comfortable, disorders of the arbitrary *taille*. Turgot resisted this slovenly reaction, and applied himself with zealous industry to the immense and complex work of effecting a complete revision and settlement of the regulations for assessment, and, what was a more gigantic enterprise, of carrying out a new survey and new valuation of lands and property, to serve as a true base for the application of an equitable assessment. At the end of thirteen years of indomitable toil the work was still unfinished, chiefly owing to want of money. The court wasted more in a fortnight in the easy follies of Versailles than would have given to the Limousin the instrument of a finished scheme of fiscal order. Turgot's labour was not wholly thrown away. The worst abuses were corrected, and the most

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crying iniquities swept away, save that iniquity of the exemption of the privileged orders, which Turgot could not yet venture to touch.

Another of the master abuses of the old system was the introduction of the *corvée*, that, in the sense in which we have to speak of it, dates no further back than the beginning of the eighteenth century. It was an encroachment and an innovation on the part of the bureaucracy, and the odd circumstance has been remarked that the first mention of the road *corvées* in any royal Act is the famous edict of 1776, which suppressed them. Until the Regency this famous word had described only the services owed by dependents to their lords. It meant so many days' labour on the lord's lands, and so many offices of domestic duty. When, in the early part of the century, the advantages of a good system of high-roads began to be perceived by the government, the convenient idea came into the heads of the more ingenious among the Intendants of imposing, for the construction of the roads, a royal or public *corvée* analogous to that of private feudalism. Few more mischievous imposts could have been devised.

That undying class who are contented with the shallow presumptions of *a priori* reasoning in economic matters, did, it is true, find specious pleas even for the road *corvée*. There has never been an abuse in the history of the world for which something good could not be said. If men earned money by labour and the use of their time, why not require from them time and labour instead of money? By the latter device, are we not assured against malversation of the funds? Those who substitute words for things, and verbal plausibilities for the observation of experience, could prolong these arguments indefinitely. The evils of the road *corvée* meanwhile remained patent and indisputable. In England at the same period,

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it is true, the country people were obliged to give six days in the year to the repair of the highways, under the management of the justices of the peace. And in England the business was performed without oppression. But then this only illustrates the unwisdom of arguing about economic arrangements in the abstract. All depends on the conditions by which the given arrangement is surrounded, and a practice that in England was merely clumsy, was in France not only clumsy but a gross cruelty. The French peasant had to give, not six, but twelve or fifteen days of labour every year for the construction and repair of the roads of his neighbourhood. If he had a horse and cart, they too were pressed into the service. He could not choose the time; he was constantly carried away at the moment when his own poor harvest needed his right arm and his supervision. He received no pay, and his days on the roads were days of hunger to himself and his family. He had the bitterness of knowing that the advantage of the high-road to himself was slight and sometimes null, while it was direct and great to the town merchants and the country gentlemen who contributed not an hour nor a sou to the work. It was exactly the most indigent upon whose backs this slavish load was placed. There were a hundred abuses of spite or partiality, of favouritism or vengeance, in the allotment of the work. The wretch was sent to the part of the road most distant from his own house; or he was forced to work for a longer time than fell fairly to his share; or he saw a neighbour allowed to escape on payment of a sum of money. And at the end of all, the roads were vile. The labourers, having little heart in work for which they had no wage, and weakened by want of food, did badly what they had to do. There was no scientific superintendence, no skilled direction, little system in the construction, little

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watchfulness as to the maintenance. The rains of winter and the storms of summer did damage that one man could have repaired by careful industry from day to day, and that for lack of this one man went on increasing, until the road fell into holes, the ditches got filled up, and deep pools of water stood permanently in the middle of the highway. The rich disdained to put a hand to the work; the poor, aware that they would be forced to the hated task in the following autumn or spring, naturally attended to their own fields, and left the roads to fall to ruin.

It need not be said that barbarous slovenliness and disorder meant incredible waste. It was calculated that a contractor would have provided and maintained fine roads for little more than one-third of the cost at which the *corvée* furnished roads that were execrable. Condorcet was right in comparing the government in this matter to a simpleton who indulges in all the more lavish riot because by paying for nothing, and getting everything at a higher price on credit, he is never frightened into sense by being confronted with a budget of his prodigalities.

It takes fewer words to describe Turgot's way of dealing with this oriental mixture of extravagance, injustice, and squalor. The Intendant of Caen had already proposed to the inhabitants of that district the alternative plan of commuting the *corvée* into money payment. Turgot adopted and perfected this transformation. He substituted for personal service on the roads a yearly rate, proportional in amount to the *taille*. He instituted a systematic survey and direction of the roads, existing or required in the Generality, and he committed the execution of the approved plans to contractors on exact and business-like principles. The result of this change was not merely an immense relief to the unfortunate men who had been every year

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harassed to death and half-ruined by the old method of forced labour, but so remarkable an improvement in both the goodness and the extension of the roads, that when Arthur Young went over them five-and-twenty years afterwards, he pronounced them by far the noblest public ways to be found anywhere in France.

Two very instructive facts may be mentioned in connection with the suppression of the *corvées* in the Limousin. The first is that the central government assented to the changes proposed by the young Intendant as promptly as if it had been a committee of the Convention, instead of being the nominee of an absolute king. The other is that the people in the country, when Turgot had his plans laid before them in their parish meetings, held after mass on Sundays, listened with the keenest distrust and suspicion to what they insisted on regarding as a sinister design for exacting more money. Well might Condorcet say that very often it needs little courage to do men harm, for they constantly suffer harm tranquilly enough; but when you take it into your head to do them some service, then they accuse you of being an innovator. It is fair, however, to remember how many good grounds the French countryman had for distrusting the professions of any agent of the government. This is only an illustration of what is now a well-known fact, that revolution was made necessary less by despotism than by privilege on the one side, and by intense political distrust on the other.

Turgot was thoroughly awake to the necessity of penetrating public opinion. The first principle of the school of Economists was an "enlightened people." Nothing was to be done by them; everything was to be done for them. But they were to be trained to understand the grounds of the measures that a central authority conceived,

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shaped, and carried into practice. Rousseau was the only writer of the revolutionary school who had the modern democratic faith in the virtue and wisdom of the common people. Voltaire habitually spoke of their bigotry and prejudice with the natural bitterness of a cultivated man towards incurable ignorance. The Economists admitted Voltaire's view as true of an existing state of things, but they looked to education, meaning by that something more than primary instruction, to lead gradually to the development of sound political intelligence. Hence when Turgot came into full power as the minister of Louis XVI., twelve years after he first went to his obscure duties in the Limousin, he introduced the method of prefacing his edicts by an elaborate statement of the reasons on which their policy rested. And on the same principle he now adopted the only means at his disposal for instructing and directing opinion. The book press was at that moment doing tremendous work among the classes with education and leisure. But the newspaper press hardly existed, and even if it had existed, however many official journals Turgot might have had under his inspiration, the people whose minds he wished to affect could not read. There was only one way of reaching them, and that was through the priests. Religious life among the Limousins was, as we have seen, not very pure, but it is a significant law of human nature that the less pure a religion is, the more important in it is the place of the priest and his office. Turgot pressed the curés into friendly service. It is a remarkable fact, not without a parallel in other parts of modern history, that of the two great conservative corporations of society, the lawyers did all they could to thwart his projects, and the priests did all they could to advance them. In truth the priests are usually more or less sympathetic towards any form

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of centralised authority; it is only when the people take their own government into their own hands that the clergy are apt to turn cold or antipathetic towards improvement. There is one other reservation, as Turgot found out in 1775, when he had been transferred to a greater post, and the clergy had joined his bitterest enemies. Then he touched the corporate spirit, and perceived that for authority to lay a hand on ecclesiastical privilege is to metamorphose good-will into malignity. Meanwhile, the letters in which Turgot explained his views and wishes to the curés, by them to be imparted to their parishes, are masterpieces of the care, the patience, the interest, of a good ruler. Those peremptory spirits who see in Frederick or Napoleon the only born rulers of men, might find in these letters, and in the acts to which they refer, the memorials of a far more admirable and beneficent type.

The *corvée*, vexatious as it was, yet excited less violent heats and inflicted less misery than the abuses of military service. There had been a militia in the country as far back as the time of the Merovingians, but the militia-service with which Turgot had to deal only dated from 1726. Each parish was bound to supply its quota of men to this service, and the obligation was perhaps the most odious grievance, though not the most really mischievous, of all that then afflicted the realm. The hatred that it raised was due to no failure of the military spirit in the people. From Frederick the Great downwards, everybody was well aware that the disasters to France, that had begun with the shameful defeat of Rossbach, and ended with the loss of Canada in the West and the Indies in the East (1757–63), were due to no want of valour in the common soldier. It was the generals, as Napoleon said fifty years

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afterwards, who were incapable and inept. And it was the ineptitude of the administrative chiefs that made the militia at once ineffective and abhorred. First, they allowed a large number of classified exemptions from the ballot. The noble, the tonsured clerk, the counsellor, the domestic of noble, tonsured clerk, and counsellor, the eldest son of the lawyer and the farmer, the tax-collector, the schoolmaster, were all exempt. Hence the curse of service was embittered by a sense of injustice. This was one of the many springs in the old régime that fed the swelling and vehement stream of passion for social equality, until at length when the day came, it made such short and furious work with the structure of envious partition between citizen and citizen.

Again, by a curious perversity of official pedantry, the government insisted on each man who drew the black ticket in the abhorred lottery, performing his service in person. It forbade substitution. Under a modern system of universal military service, this is intelligible and just. But, as we have seen, military service was only made obligatory on those who were already ground down by hardships. As a consequence of this prohibition, those who were liable to be drawn lived in despair, and as no worse thing than the black ticket could possibly befall them, they had every inducement to run away from their own homes and villages. At the approach of the commissary of the government, they fled into the woods and marshes, as if they had been pursued by the plague. This was a signal for a civil war on a small scale. Those who were left behind, and whose chance of being drawn was thus increased, hastened to pursue the fugitives with such weapons as came to their hands. In the Limousin the country was constantly the scene of murderous disorders of this kind. What was worse, was not only that the land was infested by vagabonds and

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bad characters, but that villages became half depopulated, and the soil lost its cultivators. Finally, as is uniformly the case in the history of bad government, an unjust method produced a worthless machine. The *milice* supplied as bad troops as the *corvée* supplied bad roads. The force was recruited from the lowest class of the population, and as soon as its members had learned a little drill, they were discharged and their places taken by raw batches provided at random by lot.

Turgot proposed that a character both of permanence and of locality should be given to the provincial force; that each parish or union of parishes should be required to raise a number of men; that these men should be left at home and in their own districts, and only called out for exercise for a certain time each year; and that they should be retained as a reserve force by a small payment. In this way, he argued that the government would secure a competent force, and by stimulating local pride and point of honour would make service popular instead of hateful. As the government was too weak and distracted to take up so important a scheme as this, Turgot was obliged to content himself with evading the existing regulations; and it is a curious illustration of the pliancy of Versailles, that he should have been allowed to do so openly and without official remonstrance. He permitted the victim of the ballot to provide a voluntary substitute, and he permitted the parish to tempt substitutes by payment of a sum of money on enrolment. This may seem a very obvious course to follow; but no one who has tried to realise the strength and obstinacy of routine, will measure the service of a reformer by the originality of his ideas. In affairs of government, the priceless qualities are not merely originality of resource, but a sense for things that are going wrong, and a sufficiently vigorous will to set them right.

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One general expression serves to describe this most important group of Turgot's undertakings. The reader has probably already observed that what Turgot was doing, was to take the step that is one of the most decisive in the advance of a society to a highly organised industrial stage. He displaced imposts in kind, that rudest and most wasteful form of contribution to the public service, and established in their stead a system of money payments, and of having the work of the government done on commercial principles. Thus, as if it were not enough to tear the peasant away from the soil to serve in the militia; as if it were not enough to drag away the farmer and his cattle to the public highways, the reigning system struck a third blow at agriculture by requiring the people of the localities that happened to be traversed by a regiment on the march, to supply their waggons and horses and oxen for the purposes of military transport. In this case, it is true, a certain compensation in money was allowed, but we may easily understand how inadequate was this insignificant allowance. The payment was only for one day, but the day's march was often of many miles, and the oxen, which in the Limousin mostly did the work of horses, were constantly seen to drop down dead in the roads. There was not only the one day's work. Often two, three, or five days were needed to reach the place of appointment, and for these days not even the paltry twenty sous were granted. Nor could any payment of this kind recompense the peasant for the absence of his beasts of burden on the great days when he wanted to plough his fields, to carry the grain to the barns, or to take his produce to market. The obvious remedy here, as in the *corvées*, was to have the transport effected by a contractor, and to pay him out of a rate levied on the persons liable. This was what Turgot ordered to be done.

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Of one other burden of the same species he relieved the cultivator. This unfortunate being was liable to be called upon to collect, as well as to pay, the taxes. Once nominated, he became responsible for the amount at which his commune was assessed. If he did not produce the sum, he lost his liberty. If he advanced it from his own pocket, he lost at least the interest on the money. In collecting the money from his fellow taxpayers, he not only incurred bitter and incessant animosities, but, what was harder to bear, he lost the priceless time of which his own land was only too sorely in need. In the Limousin the luckless creature had a special disadvantage, for here the collector of the *taille* had also to collect the twentieths, and the twentieths were a tax for which even the privileged classes were liable. They, as might be supposed, cavilled, disputed, and appealed. The appeal lay to a sort of county board, composed of people of their own kind, before which they too easily made out a plausible case against a clumsy collector, who more often than not knew neither how to read nor how to write. Turgot's reform of a system that was always harassing and often ruinous to an innocent individual, consisted in the creation of the task of collection into a distinct and permanent office, exercised over districts sufficiently large to make the poundage, out of which the collectors were paid, an inducement to persons of intelligence and spirit to undertake the office as a profession.

Apart from these, the most difficult of all Turgot's administrative reforms, we may notice his assiduity in watching for the smaller opportunities of making life easier to the people. His private benevolence was incessant and marked. One case of its exercise carries our minds at a word into the very midst of the storm of fire that purified France of the evil and sordid elements, that now and for his life lay like a

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mountain of lead on all Turgot's aims and efforts. A certain foreign contractor at Limoges was ruined by the famine of 1770. He had a clever son, whom Turgot charitably sent to school, and afterwards to college in Paris. The youth grew up to be the most eloquent and dazzling of the Girondins, the high-souled Vergniaud. It was not, however, in good works of merely private destination that Turgot exercised himself. In 1767 the district was infested by wolves. The Intendant imposed a small tax for the purpose of providing rewards for the destruction of these tormentors, and in reading the minutes on the subject we are reminded of the fact, that was not without its significance when the peasants rose in vengeance on their lords two-and-twenty years later, that the dispersion of the hamlets and the solitude of the farms had made it customary for the people to go about with fire-arms. Besides encouraging the destruction of noxious beasts, Turgot did something for the preservation of beasts not noxious. The first veterinary school in France had been founded at Lyons in 1762. To this he sent pupils from his province, and eventually he founded a similar school at Limoges. He suppressed a tax on cattle, which acted prejudicially on breeding and grazing; and he introduced clover into the grass-lands. The potato had been unknown in the Limousin. It was not common in any part of France; and perhaps this is not astonishing when we remember that the first field crop even in Scotland is supposed only to have been sown in the fourth decade of that century. People would not touch it, though the experiment of persuading them to cultivate this root had been frequently tried. In the Limousin the people were even more obstinate in their prejudice than elsewhere. But Turgot persevered. The ordinary view was that potatoes were hardly fit for pigs, and that in human beings they would certainly breed leprosy. Some of the

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English Puritans would not eat potatoes because they are not mentioned in the Bible, and that is perhaps no better reason than the other. When, however, it was seen that the Intendant had the hated vegetable served every day at his own table, the opposition grew more faint.

This was the time when the passion for provincial academies of all sorts was at its height. When we consider that Turgot's society was not practical but deliberative, and what themes he proposed for discussion by it, we may believe that it was one of the less useful of his works. What the farmers needed was something much more directly instructive in the methods of their business, than could come of discussions as to the effects of indirect taxation on the revenues of landowners, or the right manner of valuing the income of land in the different kinds of cultivation. "In that most unlucky path of French exertion," says Arthur Young, "this distinguished patriot was able to do nothing. This society does like other societies; they meet, converse, offer premiums, and publish nonsense. This is not of much consequence, for the people, instead of reading their memoirs, are not able to read at all. They can, however, *see*, and if a farm was established in that good cultivation which they ought to copy, something would be presented from which they *might* learn. I asked particularly if the members of this society had land in their own hands, and was assured that they had; but the conversation presently explained it. They had *métayers* round their country seats, and this was considered as farming their own lands, so that they assume something of a merit from the identical circumstance, which is the curse and ruin of the whole country."

To his superior enlightenment in another part of the commercial field we owe one of the most excellent of Turgot's pieces, his *Memorial on Loans of*

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Money. This plea for free trade in money has all the sense and liberality of the brightest side of the eighteenth-century illumination. It was suggested by circumstances. At Angoulême four or five rogues associated together, and drew bills on one another. On these bills they borrowed money, the average rate of interest being from eight to ten per cent. When the bills fell due, instead of paying them, they laid informations against the lenders for taking more than the legal rate of interest. The lenders were ruined, persons who had money were afraid to make advances, bills were protested, commercial credit was broken, and the trade of the district was paralysed. Turgot prevailed upon the Council of State to withdraw the cases from the local jurisdiction; the proceedings against the lenders were annulled, and the institution of similar proceedings forbidden. This was a characteristic course. The royal government was generally willing in the latter half of the eighteenth century to redress a given case of abuse, but it never felt itself strong enough, or had leisure enough, to deal with the general source from which the particular grievance sprang. Turgot's *Memorial* is as cogent an exposure of the mischief of Usury Laws to the public prosperity, as the more renowned pages of either Bentham or J. B. Say on the same subject.

After he had been eight years at his post, Turgot was called upon to deal with the harassing problems of a scarcity of food. In 1770 even the maize and black grain, and the chestnuts on which the people supported life, failed almost completely, and the failure extended over two years.

His first battle was on an issue that has been painfully familiar to our own Indian administrators. In 1764, an edict had been promulgated decreeing free trade in grain, not with foreign countries, but among the different provinces of the kingdom. This edict had not made much way in the

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minds either of the local officials or of the people at large, and the presence of famine made the free and unregulated export of food seem no better than a cruel paradox. The parlement of Bordeaux at once suspended the edict of 1764. They ordered that all dealers in grain, farmers of land, owners of land, of whatever rank, quality, or condition, should forthwith convey to the markets of their district "*a sufficient quantity*" of grain to provision the said markets. The same persons were forbidden to sell either by wholesale or retail any portion of the said grain at their own granaries. Turgot at once procured from the Council at Versailles the proper instrument for checking this impolitic interference with the free circulation of grain, and he contrived this instrument in such conciliatory terms as to avoid any breach with the parlement, whose motives, for that matter, were respectable enough. In spite, however, of the action of the government, popular feeling ran high against free markets. Tumultuous gatherings of famishing men and women menaced the unfortunate grain-dealers. Waggoners engaged in carrying grain away from a place where it was cheaper, to another place where it was dearer, were violently arrested in their business, and terrified from proceeding. Hunger prevented people from discerning the unanswerable force of the argument that if the grain commanded a higher price somewhere else, that was a sure sign of the need there being sharper. The local officials were as hostile as their humbler neighbours. At the town of Turenne, they forbade grain to be taken away, and forced the owners of it to sell it on the spot at the market rate. At the town of Angoulême the lieutenant of police took upon himself to order that all the grain destined for the Limousin should be unloaded and stored at Angoulême. Turgot brought a heavy hand to bear on these breakers of administrative discipline, and readily procured

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such sanction as his authority needed from the Council.

One of the measures to which Turgot resorted in meeting the destitution of the country, was the establishment of the Charitable Workshops. Some of the advocates of the famous National Workshops of 1848 have appealed to this example of the severe patriot, for a sanction to their own economic policy. It is not clear that the logic of the Socialist is here more remorseless than usual. If the State may set up workshops to aid people who are short of food because the harvest has failed, why should it not do the same when people are short of food because trade is bad, work scarce, and wages intolerably low? Of course Turgot's answer would have been that remorseless logic is the most improper instrument in the world for a business of rough expedients. There is a vital difference in practice between opening a public workshop in the exceptional emergency of a famine, and keeping public workshops open as a normal interference with the free course of industrial activity. To invoke Turgot as a dabbler in Socialism because he opened *ateliers de charité*, is as unreasonable as it would be to make an English minister, who should suspend the Bank Charter Act in a crisis, into the champion of inconvertible paper currency. Turgot always regarded the sums paid in his works, not as wages, but as alms. All that he urged was that "the best and most useful kind of alms consists in providing means for earning them." To prevent the workers from earning aid with as little trouble to themselves as possible, he recommended payment by the piece and not by the day. To check workers from flocking in from their regular employments, he insisted on the wages being kept below the ordinary rate, and he urged the propriety of driving as sharp bargains as possible in fixing the price of the piece of work. To prevent the dissipation of earnings at

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the tavern, he paid not in money, but in leathern tokens, that were only current in exchange for provisions. All these regulations mark a wide enough gulf between the Economist of 1770 and the Socialist of 1848.

The story of the famine in the Limousin brings to light some instructive facts as to the temper of the lords and rich proprietors on the eve of the changes that were to destroy them. Turgot had been specially anxious that as much as possible of what was necessary for the relief of distress should be done by private persons. He knew the straits of the government. He knew how hard it would be to extract from it the means of repairing a deficit in his own finances. Accordingly he invited the landowners, not merely to contribute sums of money in return for the public works carried on in their neighbourhood, but also, by way of providing employment to their indigent neighbours, to undertake such works as they should find convenient on their own estates. The response was disappointing. "The districts," he wrote in 1772, "where I have works on foot, do not give me reason to hope for much help on the side of the generosity of the nobles and the rich landowners. The Prince de Soubise is so far the only person who has given anything for the works that have been executed in his duchy." Nor was abstinence from generosity the worst part of this failure in public spirit. The same nobles and landowners who refused to give, did not refuse to take away. Most of them proceeded at once to dismiss their *métayers*, the people who farmed their lands in consideration of a fixed proportion of the produce. Turgot, in an ordinance of admirable gravity, remonstrated against this harsh and impolitic proceeding. He pointed out that the unfortunate wretches, thus stripped of every resource, would have to leave the district, abandoning their wives and children to the charity of villages that were

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already overburdened with the charge of their own people.

Turgot's policy in this matter is more instructive as to the social state of France, than it may at first sight appear. At first sight we are astonished to find the austere economist travelling so far from the orthodox path of free contract as to order a landowner to furnish at his own cost subsistence for his impoverished tenants. But the *métayer* was not a free tenant in the sense which we attach to the word. "*In the Limousin*," says Arthur Young, "*the métayers are considered as little better than menial servants.*" And it is not going beyond the evidence to say that they were even something lower than menial servants; they were really a kind of serf-caste. They lived in the lowest misery. More than half of them were computed to be deeply in debt to the proprietors. In many cases they were even reduced every year to borrow from their landlord, before the harvest came round, such coarse bread of mixed rye and barley as he might choose to lend them. What Turgot therefore had in his mind was no relation of free contract, though it was that legally, but a relation which partly resembled that of a feudal lord to his retainer, and partly that of a planter to his negroes. It is less surprising, then, that Turgot should have enforced some of the responsibilities of the lord and the planter.

The nobles had resort to a still more indefensible measure than the expulsion of their *métayers*. Most of the lands in the Generality of Limoges were charged with dues in kind payable to the lords. As the cultivators had for the most part no grain even for their own bread, they naturally had no grain for the lords' dues. The lords then insisted on payment in cash, and they insisted on estimating this payment at the famine price of the grain. Most of them were really as needy as they were idle and proud, and nothing is so inordin-

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ately grasping as the indigence of class-pride. The effect of their proceedings now was to increase their revenue fourfold and fivefold out of public calamity and universal misery. And unfortunately the liability of the cultivators in a given manor was *solidaire*; they were jointly and severally responsible, and the effect of this was that even those who were in circumstances to pay the quadrupled dues, were ruined and destroyed without mercy in consequence of having also to pay the quadrupled dues of their beggared neighbours. Turgot arrested this odious process by means of an old and forgotten decree, that he prevailed upon the parlement of Bordeaux to revive in good and due form, to the effect that the arrears of dues in kind for 1769 should be paid at the market price of grain when the dues were payable; that is, before the scarcity had declared itself.

When we consider the grinding and extortionate spirit thus shown in face of a common calamity, we may cease to wonder at the ferocity with which, when the hour struck, the people tore away privilege, distinction, and property itself, from classes that had used all three only to ruin the land and crush its inhabitants into the dust. And the moment that the lord had thus transformed himself into a mere creditor, and a creditor for goods delivered centuries ago, and long since consumed and forgotten, then it was certain that, if political circumstances favoured the growing economic sentiment, there would be heard again the old cry of the Roman plebs for an agrarian law and *novae tabulae*. Nay, something was heard that is amazingly like the cry of the modern Irish peasant. In 1776 two noteworthy incidents happened. A certain Marquis de Vibraye threw into prison a peasant who refused to pay the *droit de cens*. Immediately between thirty and forty peasants came to the rescue, armed themselves, besieged the château,

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took it and sacked it, and drove the Marquis de Vibraye away in terror. Still more significant is the second incident, shortly after. A relative of the Duke of Mortemart, shooting on his property, was attacked by peasants who insisted that he should cease his sport. They treated him with much brutality, and even threatened to fire on him and his attendants, "*claiming to be free masters of their lands.*" Here was the main root of the Revolution. A fair consideration of the details of such an undertaking as Turgot's administration of the Limousin helps us to understand two things: first, that all the ideas necessary for the pacific transformation of French society were there in the midst of it; second, that the system of privilege had fostered such a spirit in one class, and the reaction against the inconsiderate manifestation of that spirit was so violent in the other class, that political ideas were vain and inapplicable.

It is curious to find that, in the midst of his beneficent administration, Turgot was rating practical work very low in comparison with the achievements of the student and the thinker. "You are very fortunate," Condorcet said to him, "in having a passion for the public good, and in being able to satisfy it; it is a great consolation, and of a very superior order to the consolation of mere study." "Nay," replied Turgot, in his next letter, "whatever you may say, I believe that the satisfaction derived from study is superior to any other kind of satisfaction. I am perfectly convinced that one may be, through study, a thousand times more useful to men than in any of our subordinate posts. There we torment ourselves, and often without any compensating success, to secure some small benefits, while we are the involuntary instrument of evils that are by no means small. All our small benefits are transitory, while the light that a man of letters is able to diffuse must, sooner or

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later, destroy all the artificial evils of the human race, and place it in a position to enjoy all the goods that nature offers." It is clear that we can only accept Turgot's preference, on condition that the man of letters is engaged on work that seriously advances social interests and adds something to human stature.[1]

Turgot himself, however, found time, in his industry at Limoges, to make a contribution to a kind of literature that has seriously modified the practical arrangements and social relations of the western world. In 1766 he published his *Essay on the Formation and Distribution of Wealth*—a short but most pithy treatise, in which he anticipated some of the leading economic principles of the greater work by Adam Smith, given to the world ten years later. Turgot's essay has none of the breadth of historic outlook, and none of the amplitude of concrete illustrations from real affairs, that make the *Wealth of Nations* so deeply fertile, so persuasive, so interesting, so thoroughly alive, so genuinely enriching to the understanding of the judicious reader. But the comparative dryness of Turgot's too concise form does not blind the historian of political economy to the merit of the substance of his propositions. It was no small proof of originality and enlightenment to precede Adam Smith by ten years in the doctrines of free trade, of free industry, of loans on interest, of the constitutive elements of price, of the effects of the division of labour, of the processes of the formation of capital.

V

In May 1774 Louis XV. died. His successor was only twenty years old; he was sluggish in mind, vacillating in temper, and inexperienced in affairs. Maurepas was recalled, to become the new king's

[1] See *Critical Miscellanies*, p. 201.

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chief adviser; and Maurepas, at the suggestion of one of Turgot's college friends, summoned the Intendant from Limoges, and placed him at the head of the department of marine. This post Turgot only held for a couple of months; he was then preferred to the high office of Controller-General. The condition of the national finance made its administration the most important of all the departments of the government. Turgot's policy in this high sphere belongs to the general history of France, and there is no occasion for us to reproduce its details here. It was mainly an attempt to extend over the whole realm the kind of reforms that had been tried on a small scale in the Limousin. He suppressed the *corvées*, and he tacked the money payment which was substituted for that burden on to the twentieths, an impost from which the privileged class was not exempt. "The weight of this charge," he made the king say in the edict of suppression, "now falls and must fall only on the poorest classes of our subjects." This truth only added to the exasperation of the rich, and perhaps might well have been omitted. Along with the *corvées* were suppressed the *jurandes*, or exclusive industrial corporations or trade-guilds, whose monopolies and restrictions were so mischievous an impediment to the well-being of the country. In the preamble to this edict we seem to be breathing the air, not of Versailles in 1775, but of the Convention in 1793:—"God, when he made man with wants, and rendered labour an indispensable resource, made the right of work the property of every individual in the world, and this property is the first, the most sacred, and the most imprescriptible of all kinds of property. We regard it as one of the first duties of our justice, and as one of the acts most of all worthy of our benevolence, to free our subjects from every infraction of that inalienable right of humanity."

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Again, Turgot removed a tax from certain forms of lease, with a view to promote the substitution of a system of farming for the system of *métayers*. He abolished an obstructive privilege by which the Hôtel Dieu had the exclusive right of selling meat during Lent. The whole of the old incoherent and vexatious police of the corn-markets was swept away. Finally, he inspired the publication of a short but important writing, Boncerf's *Inconvénients des droits féodaux*, in which, without criticising the origin of the privileges of the nobles, the author showed how much it would be to the advantage of the lords to accept a commutation of their feudal dues. What was still more exasperating to both nobles and lawyers was the author's hardy assertion that if the lords refused the offer of their vassals, the king had the power to settle the question for them by his own legislative authority. This was the most important and decisive of the pre-revolutionary tracts.

Equally violent prejudices and more sensitive interests were touched by two other sets of proposals. The minister began to talk of a new territorial contribution, and a great survey and re-assessment of the land. Then followed an edict restoring in good earnest the free circulation of corn within the kingdom. Turgot was a partisan of free trade in its most entire application; but for the moment he contented himself with the free importation of grain and its free circulation at home, without sanctioning its exportation abroad.

The measures were all excellent in themselves. They were steps towards the construction of a fabric of freedom and justice. But they provoked a host of bitter and irreconcilable enemies, while they raised up no corresponding host of energetic supporters. That the country clergy should denounce the Philosopher, as they called him, from the pulpit and the steps of the altar, was

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natural enough. Many even of his old colleagues of the Encyclopaedia had joined Necker against the minister. The greatest of them all, it is true, stood by Turgot with unfailing staunchness; a shower of odes, diatribes, dialogues, allegories, dissertations, came from the Patriarch of Ferney to confound and scatter the enemies of the new reforms. But the people were unmoved. If Turgot published an explanation of the high price of grain, they perversely took explanation for gratulation, and thought the Controller preferred to have bread dear. If he put down seditious risings with a strong hand, they insisted that he was in nefarious league with the corn-merchants and the bakers. How was it that the people did not recognise the hand of a benefactor? The answer is that they suspected the source of the new reforms too virulently to judge them calmly. For half a century, as Condorcet says, they had been undergoing the evils of anarchy, while they supposed that they were feeling those of despotism. The error was grave, but it was natural, and one effect of it was to make every measure that proceeded from the court odious. Hence, when the parlements took up their judicial arms in defence of abuses and against reforms, the common people took sides with them, for no better reason than that this was to take sides against the king's government. Malesherbes in those days, and good writers since, held that the only safe plan was to convoke the States-General. They would at least have shared the responsibility with the crown. Turgot rejected this opinion. By doctrine, no less than by temperament, he disliked the control of a government by popular bodies. Everything for the people, nothing by the people: this was the maxim of the Economists, and Turgot held it in all its rigour. The royal authority was the only instrument that he could bring himself to use. Even if he could have

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counted on a Frederick or a Napoleon, the instrument would hardly have served his purposes; as things were, it was a broken reed that he had to his hand, not a fine sword.

The National Assembly and the Convention went to work in exactly the same stiff and absolute spirit as Turgot. They were just as little disposed to gradual, moderate, and compromising ways as he. But with them the absolute authority on which they leaned was real and most potent; with him it was a shadow. We owe it to Turgot that the experiment was complete: he proved that the monarchy of divine right was incapable of reform.[1] As it has been sententiously expressed, "The part of the sages was played out; there was now room for the men of destiny."

If the repudiation of a popular assembly was a cardinal error in Turgot's scheme of policy, there were other errors added. The publication of Boncerf's attack on the feudal dues, with the undisguised sanction of the minister, has been justly condemned as a grave imprudence, and as involving a forgetfulness of the true principles of government and administration, that would certainly not have been committed either by Colbert, in whom Turgot professed to seek his model, or by Gournai, who had been his master. It was a broad promise of reforms which Turgot was by no means sure of being able to persuade the king and his council to adopt. By prematurely divulging his projects, it augmented the number of his adversaries, without being definite enough to bring new friends.[2] Again, Turgot did nothing to redeem it by personal conciliatoriness in carrying out the designs of a benevolent absolutism. The royal prince, long afterwards Louis XVIII., wrote

[1] Foncin's *Ministère de Turgot*, p. 574.

[2] See Mauguin's *Études historiques sur l'administration de l'agriculture*, i. 353.

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a satire on the government during Turgot's ministry, and in it there is a picture of the great reformer as he appeared to his enemies: "There was then in France an awkward, heavy, clumsy creature; born with more rudeness than character, more obstinacy than firmness, more impetuosity than tact; a charlatan in administration no less than in virtue, exactly formed to get the one decried, and to disgust the world with the other; made harsh and distant by his self-love, and timid by his pride; as much a stranger to men, whom he had never known, as to the public weal, which he had never seen aright; this man was called Turgot."

It is a cheap mistake to take the word of political adversaries for a man's character, but adversaries sometimes only say out aloud what is already suspected by friends. The coarse account given by the Count of Provence shows us where Turgot's weakness as a ruler may have lain. He was distant and stiff in manner, and encouraged no approach. Even his health went against him, for at a critical time in his short ministry he was confined to bed by gout for four months, and could see nobody save clerks and secretaries. The very austerity, loftiness, and purity, that make him so reverend and inspiring a figure in the pages of the noble-hearted Condorcet, may well have been impediments in dealing with a society that, in the fatal words of the Roman historian, could bear neither its disorders nor their remedies.

The king had once said pathetically: "It is only M. Turgot and I who love the people." But even with the king, there were points at which the minister's philosophic severity strained their concord. Turgot was the friend of Voltaire and Condorcet; he counted Christianity a form of superstition; and he, who as a youth had refused to go through life wearing the mask of the infidel abbé, had too much self-respect in his manhood

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to practise the rites and uses of a system he considered a degradation of the understanding. One day the king said to Maurepas: "You have given me a Controller-General who never goes to mass." "Sire," replied that ready worldling, "the abbé Terrai always went"—and Terrai had brought the government to bankruptcy. But Turgot hurt the king's conscience more directly than by staying away from mass and confession. Faithful to the long tradition of his ancestors, Louis XVI. wished the ceremony of his coronation to take place at Rheims. Turgot urged that it should be performed at Paris, and as cheaply as possible. And he advanced on to still more delicate ground. In the rite of consecration, the usage was that the king should take an oath to pursue all heretics. Turgot demanded the suppression of this declaration of intolerance. It was pointed out to him that it was only a formality. But Turgot was one of the scrupulous to whom a wicked promise does not cease to be degrading by becoming hypocritical. It was only by the gradual extinction of the vestiges of her ancient barbarisms, as occasion offered, that the church could have escaped the crash of the Revolution. Meanwhile, the king and the priests had their own way: the king was crowned at Rheims, and the priests exacted from him an oath to be unjust, oppressive, and cruel towards a portion of his subjects. Turgot could only remonstrate; but the philosophic memorial in which he protested in favour of religious freedom and equality gave the king a serious shock.

He was dismissed in the beginning of May 1776, having been in power little more than twenty months. "You are too hurried," Malesherbes had said to him. "You think you have the love of the public good; not at all; you have a rage for it, for a man must be nothing short of enraged to insist on forcing the hand of the whole world."

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Turgot replied, more pathetically perhaps than reasonably, "What, you accuse me of haste, and you know that in my family we die of gout at fifty!"

There is something tragic in the joy with which Turgot's dismissal was received on all sides. "I seem," said Marmontel, "to be looking at a band of brigands in the forest of Bondy, who have just heard that the provost-marshal has been discharged." Voltaire and Condorcet were not more dismayed by the fall of the minister than by the insensate delight that greeted the catastrophe. "This event," wrote Condorcet, "has changed all nature in my eyes. I have no longer the same pleasure in looking at those fair landscapes over which he would have shed happiness and contentment. The sight of the gaiety of the people wrings my heart. They dance and sport, as if they had lost nothing. Ah, we have had a delicious dream, but it has been all too short." Voltaire was equally inconsolable, and still more violent in the expression of his grief. When he had become calmer, he composed those admirable verses—*To a Man*:

> Philosophe indulgent, ministre citoyen,
> Qui ne cherchas le vrai que pour faire le bien,
> Qui d'un peuple léger et trop ingrat peut-être
> Préparais le bonheur et celui de son maître,
> Ce qu'on nomme disgrace a payé tes bienfaits.
> Le vrai prix de travail n'est que de vivre en paix.

Turgot at first showed resentment at the levity with which he had been banished from power, and he put on no airs of theatrical philosophy. He would have been untrue to the sincerity of his character if he had affected indifference or satisfaction at seeing his beneficent hopes for ever destroyed. But chagrin did not numb his industry. Condorcet went to visit him some months after his fall. He describes Turgot as reading Ariosto, as making experiments in physics, and as having forgotten all

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that had passed within the last two years, save when the sight of evils that he would have mitigated or removed happened to remind him of it. He occupied himself busily with chemistry and optics, with astronomy and mechanics, and above all with meteorology, a new science in those days, and the value of which to the study of the conditions of human health, of the productions of the earth, of navigation, excited his most ardent anticipations. Turgot also was so moved by the necessity for a new synthesis of life and knowledge as to frame a plan for a great work "on the human soul, the order of the universe, the Supreme Being, the principles of societies, the rights of men, political constitutions, legislation, administration, physical education, the means of perfecting the human race relatively to the progressive advance and employment of their forces, to the happiness of which they are susceptible, to the extent of the knowledge to which they may attain." While his mind was moving through these immense spaces of thought, he did not forget the things of the hour. He invented a machine for serving ship's cables. He wrote a plea for allowing Captain Cook's vessel to remain unmolested during the American war. With Adam Smith, with Dr. Price, with Franklin, with Hume, he kept up a grave correspondence. Of his own countrymen, Condorcet was his most faithful friend and disciple.

We have already said that the keyword to Turgot's political aims and social theory was not Pity nor Benevolence, but Justice. It was Justice also, not temporary Prejudice nor Passion, that guided his judgment through the heated issues of the time. This exact reasonableness it was impossible to surprise or throw off its guard. His intellectual probity never suffered itself to be tempted. He protested against the doctrines of Helvétius's book, *De l'esprit*, and of D'Holbach's

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Système de la Nature, at a moment when some of his best friends were enthusiastic in admiration, for no better reason than that the doctrines of the two books were hateful to the ecclesiastics and destructive of the teaching of the church. Condorcet had maintained that scrupulous persons are not fit for great things. A Christian, he said, will waste, in subduing the darts of the flesh, time he might have employed upon things that would have been useful to humanity; he will never venture to rise against tyrants, for fear of having formed a hasty judgment, and so forth in other cases. "No virtue," replies Turgot, "in whatever sense you take the word, can dispense with justice; and I think no better of the people who do your *great things* at the cost of justice, than I do of poets who fancy that they can produce great wonders of imagination without order and regularity. I know that excessive precision tends to deaden the fire alike of action and of composition; but there is a medium in everything. There has never been any question in our controversy of a capuchin wasting his time in quenching the darts of the flesh, though, by the way, in the whole sum of time wasted, the term expressing the time lost in satisfying the appetites of the flesh would probably be found to be decidedly the greater of the two." This parenthesis is one of a hundred illustrations of Turgot's habitual refusal to be carried out of the path of exact rationality, or to take for granted a single word of the common form of the dialect even of his best friends and closest associates. And the readiness with which men fall into common form, the levity with which they settle the most complex and difficult issues, stirred in Turgot what Michelet calls *férocité*, and Matthew Arnold by the better name of *saeva indignatio*. "Turgot was filled with an astonished, awful, oppressive sense of the *immoral thoughtlessness* of men; of the

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heedless, hazardous way in which they deal with things of the greatest moment to them; of the immense, incalculable misery which is due to this cause."

He died on the 20th of March 1781, leaving to posterity the memory of a character more lofty, noble, and imposing than the chances of Time permitted to the summary of his performance. Condorcet saw in this harmonious union and fine balance of qualities the secret of his unpopularity. "Envy," he says, "seems more closely to attend a character that approaches perfection, than one that, while astonishing men by its greatness, yet by exhibiting a mixture of defects and vices, offers a consolation that envy seeks."

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CONDORCET

Of the illustrious thinkers and writers who for two generations had been actively scattering the seed of revolution in France, only Condorcet survived to behold the first bitter ingathering of the harvest. Those who had sown the wind were no more; he only was left to see the reaping of the whirlwind, and to be swiftly and cruelly swept away by it. Voltaire and Diderot, Rousseau and Helvétius, had vanished, but Condorcet both assisted in the Encyclopaedia and sat in the Convention; the one eminent man, of those who had tended the tree, who also came in due season to partake of its fruit. In neither character has he attracted the good-will of any of those considerable sections and schools into which criticism of the Revolution has been mainly divided. As a thinker he is roughly classed as an Economist, and as a practical politician he figured first in the Legislative Assembly, and then in the Convention. As a rule, the political parties that have most admired the Convention have had least sympathy with the Economists, and the historians who are most favourable to Turgot and his followers are usually most hostile to the actions and associations of the great revolutionary chamber successively swayed by Vergniaud, Danton, Robespierre. Between the two, Condorcet's name has been allowed to lie hidden for the most part in a certain obscurity, or else has been covered with those taunts and innuendoes that partisans are wont to lavish on men of whom they do not

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know exactly whether they are with or against them.

Generally the men of the Revolution are criticised in blocks and sections, and Condorcet cannot be accurately placed under any of these received schools. He was an Economist, but he was something more; the most characteristic article in his creed was a passionate belief in the infinite perfectibility of human nature. He was more of a Girondin than a Jacobin, yet he did not always act, any more than he always thought, with the Girondins, and he did not fall when they fell, but was proscribed by a decree specially levelled at himself. Isolation of this kind is no merit in political action, but it explains the coldness with which Condorcet's memory has been treated; it flowed from some marked singularities both of character and opinion that are of the highest interest, if we consider the position of the man and the lustre of the time. "Condorcet," said D'Alembert, "is a volcano covered with snow." Said another, less picturesquely: "He is a sheep in a passion." "You may say of the intelligence of Condorcet in relation to his person," wrote Madame Roland, "that it is a subtle essence soaked in cotton." The curious mixture disclosed by sayings like these, of warm impulse and fine purpose with immovable reserve, only shows that he of whom they were spoken belonged to the natures that may be called non-conducting. They are not effective, because without this effluence of power and feeling from within, the hearer or onlooker is stirred by no sympathetic thrill. They cannot be the happiest, because consciousness of the inequality between the influence intended and the impression conveyed must be as tormenting as to one who dreams is the vain effort to strike a blow. If to be of this non-conducting temperament is impossible in the really greatest characters, like St. Paul, St. Bernard, or

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Luther, at least it is no proper object of blame, for it is constantly the companion of lofty and generous aspiration. It was perhaps unfortunate that Condorcet should have permitted himself to be drawn into a position where his want of that magical quality, by which even Marat could gain the sympathies of men, should be so conspicuously made visible. The character of Condorcet offers nothing to the theatrical instinct. None the less on this account should we be willing to weigh the contributions he made to the stock of science and social speculation, and recognise the elevation of his sentiments, his noble solicitude for human well-being, his eager and resolute belief in its indefinite expansion, and the devotion that sealed his faith by a destiny as tragical as any in those sanguinary days.

I

Condorcet was born at a small town in Picardy, in the year 1743. His father was a cavalry officer who died when his son was only three years old. Condillac was his uncle, but there is no record of any intercourse between them. His mother was a devout and trembling soul, who dedicated her child to the Holy Virgin, and for eight years or more made him wear the dress of a girl, by way of sheltering him against the temptations and unbelief of a vile world. Condorcet was weakened physically by much confinement and the constraint of cumbrous clothing; and not even his dedication to the Holy Virgin prevented him from growing up the most ardent of the admirers of Voltaire. His earliest instructors, as happened to most of the sceptical philosophers, were the Jesuits, then within a few years of their fall. The Jesuits were the official instructors of France for the first half of the eighteenth century. In 1764 the Order was thrust forth from the country, and they left behind them an

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army of the bitterest enemies that Christianity has ever had. To do them justice, they were destroyed by weapons which they had themselves supplied. The intelligence they had developed and sharpened turned inevitably against the incurable faults in their own system. They were admirable teachers of mathematics. Condorcet, instructed by the Jesuits at Rheims, was able when he was only fifteen years old to go through such performances in analysis as to win especial applause from illustrious judges like D'Alembert and Clairaut. It was impossible, however, for Jesuits, as it has ever been for all enemies of movement, to constrain within prescribed limits an activity once effectively stirred. Mathematics has always been in the eyes of the church a harmless branch of knowledge, but the mental energy that mathematics first touched is apt to turn itself by and by to more complex and dangerous subjects in the scientific hierarchy.

At any rate, Condorcet's curiosity was speedily drawn to problems beyond geometry and algebra. "For thirty years," he wrote in 1790, "I have hardly ever passed a single day without meditating on the political sciences."[1] Thus, at seventeen, when the ardour of even the choicest spirits is usually most purely intellectual, moral and social feeling was rising in Condorcet to that supremacy it afterwards attained in him. He wrote essays on integral calculus, but he was already beginning to reflect upon the laws of human societies and the conditions of moral obligation. At the root of Condorcet's nature was a profound sensibility of constitution. One of his biographers explains his early enthusiasm for virtue and human welfare as the conclusion of a kind of syllogism. It is possible that the syllogism was only the later shape into which an instinctive impulse threw itself by way of rational entrenchment. His sensibility caused him

[1] *Œuvres de Condorcet* (12 vols., 1847-49), ix. 489.

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to abandon the pleasures of the chase that had at first powerfully attracted him.[1] To derive delight from what inflicts pain on any sentient creature revolted his conscience and offended his reason, because he perceived that the character which does not shrink from associating its own joy with the anguish of another, is either found or left mortally blunted to the finest impressions of humanity.

It is thus assured that from the beginning Condorcet was unable to satisfy himself with the mere knowledge of the specialist, but felt the necessity of placing social aims at the head and front of his life, and of subordinating to them all other pursuits. Such a temper of mind has penetrated no man more fully than Condorcet, though there are other thinkers to whom time and chance have been more favourable in making that temper permanently productive. There is a fine significance in his words, after the dismissal of Turgot from office: "We have had a delightful dream, but it was too brief. Now I mean to apply myself to geometry. It is terribly cold to be for the future labouring only for the *gloriole*, after flattering oneself for a while that one was working for the public weal." It is true that a geometer, too, works for the public weal; but the process is tardy, and we may well pardon an impatience that sprang of reasoned zeal for the happiness of mankind. There is something much more attractive about Condorcet's undisguised disappointment at having to exchange active public labour for geometrical problems, than in the affected satisfaction conventionally professed by statesmen driven from place to their books. His correspondence shows that, even when his mind seemed to be most concentrated upon his special studies, he was incessantly on the alert for every new idea, book, transaction, likely to stimulate the love of virtue in individuals, or to increase the strength of justice in

[1] *Œuvres de Condorcet*, i. 220.

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society. It would have been in one sense more fortunate for him to have cared less for high social interests, if we remember the contention of his latter days and the catastrophe that brought them to a frightful close. But Condorcet was not one of those natures who can think it happiness to look passively out from the tranquil literary watch-tower upon the mortal struggles of a society on the point of overthrow.

In 1769 Condorcet became connected with the Academy, to the mortification of his relations, who hardly pardoned him for not being a captain of horse like his father. About the same time, or a little later, he performed a pilgrimage of a kind that could hardly help making a mark upon a character so impressible. In company with D'Alembert he went to Ferney and saw Voltaire.[1] To the position of Voltaire in Europe in 1770 there has never been any other man's position in any age wholly comparable. It is true that there had been one or two of the great popes, and a great ecclesiastic like St. Bernard, who had exercised a spiritual authority, pretty universally submitted to, or even spontaneously invoked, throughout western Europe. But these were the representatives of a powerful organisation and an accepted system. Voltaire filled a place before men's eyes in the eighteenth century as conspicuous and as authoritative as that of St. Bernard in the twelfth. The difference was that Voltaire's place was unofficial in its origin, and indebted to no system nor organisation for its maintenance. Again, there have been others, like Bacon or Descartes, destined to make a far more permanent contribution to the ideas that have extended the powers and elevated the happiness of men; but these great spirits for the most part laboured for the generation that followed them, and won comparatively slight recognition from their own age. Voltaire during

[1] Sept. 1770. Voltaire's *Corr.* vol. lxxi. p. 147.

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his life enjoyed to the full not only the admiration belonging to the poet, but something of the veneration paid to the thinker, and even something of the glory usually reserved for captains and conquerors of renown. No other man before or since ever hit so exactly the mark of his time on every side, so precisely met the conditions of fame for the moment, nor so thoroughly dazzled and reigned over the foremost men and women who were his contemporaries. Wherever else intellectual fame has approached the fame of Voltaire, it has been posthumous. With him it was immediate and splendid. He was an unsurpassed master of the art of literary expression in a country where that art is more highly prized than anywhere else; he was the most brilliant of wits among a people whose relish for wit is a supreme passion; he won the admiration of the lighter souls by his plays, of the learned by his interest in science, of the men of letters by his never-ceasing flow of essays, criticisms, and articles, not one of which lacks vigour and freshness and sparkle; he was the most active, bitter, and telling foe of what was then the most distracted and dislocated of all institutions—the church. Add to these remarkable titles to honour and popularity that he was no mere declaimer against oppression and injustice in the abstract, but the strenuous, persevering, and absolutely indefatigable champion of every victim of oppression or injustice whose case was once brought under his eye.

It is not difficult to perceive the fascination that Voltaire, with this character, would have for a man like Condorcet. He conceived the warmest attachment to Voltaire, and Voltaire in turn the highest respect for him. Their correspondence (1770–78) is perhaps as interesting as any letters of that period: Voltaire is always bright, playful, and affectionate; Condorcet more declamatory and less graceful, but full of reverence and loyalty for his "dear and

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illustrious" master, and of his own peculiar eagerness for good causes and animosity against the defenders of bad ones. Condorcet was younger than the patriarch of Ferney by nearly half a century, but this did not prevent him from loyal remonstrances on more than one occasion against conduct on Voltaire's part in this matter or that, which he held to be unworthy. He went so far as actually to decline to print in the *Mercure* a letter in which the writer in some fit of spleen placed Montesquieu below D'Aguesseau. "My attachment," he says, "bids me say what will be best for you, and not what might please you most. If I loved you less, I should not have the courage to thwart you. I am aware of your grievances against Montesquieu; it is worthy of you to forget them." There was perhaps as much moral courage in doing this as in defying the Men of the Mountain in the days of the Terror. It dispels some false impressions of Voltaire's supposed intolerance of criticism, to find him thanking Condorcet for one of these friendly protests. "One sees things ill," he writes, "when one sees them from too far off. After all, we ought never to blush to go to school if we are as old as Methuselah. I repeat my acknowledgments to you."[1] Condorcet did not conceive that either to be blind to a man's errors or to compromise them is to prove yourself his friend. There is an integrity of friendship as in public concerns, and he adhered to it as manfully in one as in the other.

Perhaps we see him most characteristically in his correspondence with Turgot. What Turgot loved in him was his "simplicity of character."[2] Turgot was almost as much less vivacious than Condorcet, as Condorcet was less vivacious than Voltaire. They belonged to distinct types, but this may be a condition of the most perfect forms of sympathy. Turgot was one of those serene, capacious, and sure intelli-

[1] *Œuvres*, i. 41. [2] *Œuvres de Turgot*, ii. 817.

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gences whose aspirations do not become low or narrow by being watchfully held under the control of reason; whose ideas are no less vigorous or exuberant because they move in a steady and ordered train; and who, in their most fervent reactions against abuses or crimes, resist the vehement temptation to excess that is the besetting infirmity of generous natures. Condorcet was very different from this. Whatever he wished he wished unrestrainedly. As with most men of the epoch, the habit of making allowances was not his. We observe something theological in his hatred of theologians. Even in his letters the distant ground-swell of repressed passion sounds in the ear, and at every mention of false opinion or evil-doing a sombre and angry shadow seems to fall upon the page. Both he and Turgot clung to the doctrine of the infinite perfectibility of human nature, and the correspondingly infinite augmentation of human happiness; but Condorcet's ever-smouldering impetuosity would be content with nothing less than the arrival of at least a considerable instalment of this infinite quantity now and instantly. He went so far as to insist that by and by men would acquire the art of prolonging their lives for several generations, instead of being confined within the fatal span of threescore years and ten. He was impatient of any frittering away of life in scruple, tremors, and hesitations.

The main currents of opinion and circumstance in France, when Condorcet came to take his place among her workers, are now well understood. The third quarter of the century was just closing. Louis XV. died in 1774; and though his death was of little intrinsic consequence, except as the removal of every corrupt heart is of consequence, it is justly taken to mark the date of the beginning of the French Revolution. It was the accidental shifting of position that served to disclose the existing

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system to be smitten with a mortal paralysis. It is often said that what destroyed the French kingdom was despotism. A sounder explanation discovers the causes less in despotism than in anarchy—anarchy in every department where it could be most ruinous. No substantial reconstruction was possible, because all the evils came from the sinister interests of the nobles, the clergy, or the financiers; and these classes, informally bound together against the common weal, were too strong for either the sovereign or the ablest minister to thrust them aside. The material condition of France was one of supreme embarrassment and disorder, only curable by remedies that the political and social condition of the country made it impossible to employ.

This would explain why a change of some sort was inevitable. But why was the change which actually took place, in that direction rather than another? Why did not France sink under her economical disorders, as greater empires than France had done? Why, instead of sinking and falling asunder, did the French people advance with a singleness of impulse unknown before in their history to their own deliverance? How was it that they overthrew the system that was crushing them, and purged themselves with fire and sword of those who administered and maintained it, defying the hopes of the nation; and then successfully encountered the giant's task of beating back reactionary Europe with one arm, and reconstructing the fabric of their own society with the other? The answer to this question is found in the moral and spiritual condition of France. A generation aroused by the social ideas of the eighteenth century, looking round to survey its own social state, found itself in the midst of the ruin and disorder of the disintegrated system of the twelfth century. The life was gone out of the ancient

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organisation of Catholicism and Feudalism, and it seemed as if nothing but corruption remained. What enabled the leaders of the nation to discern the horror and despair of this anarchic dissolution of the worn-out old, and what inspired them with hope and energy when they thought of the possible new, was the spiritual preparation that had been in swift progress since the third decade of the century. The forms and methods of this preparation were various as the temperaments that came beneath its influence. But the school of Voltaire, the school of Rousseau, and the schools of Quesnay and Montesquieu, different as they were at the roots, all alike energetically familiarised the public mind with a firm belief in human reason, and the idea of the natural rights of man. They impregnated it with a growing enthusiasm for social justice. It is true that we find Voltaire complaining towards the close of his days, of the century being satiated and weary, *un siècle dégoûté*, not knowing well what it wanted. "The public," he said, "has been eighty years at table, and now it drinks a little bad cognac at the end of its meal." [1] In literature and art this was true; going deeper than these, the public was eager and sensitive with a freshness far more vital and more fruitful than it had known eighty years back. Sitting down with a keen appetite for taste, erudition, and literary knowledge, men had now risen up from a dazzling and palling board, with a new hunger and thirst after social righteousness. This was the noble faith that saved France; by this sign she was victorious. A people once saturated with a passionate conception of justice is not likely to fall into a Byzantine stage.

Condorcet's peculiarities of political antipathy and preference can hardly be better illustrated than by his view of the two great revolutions in English history. The first was religious, and therefore he

[1] Letters to Condorcet (1774). *Œuvres*, i. 85.

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hated it; the second was accompanied by much argument, and had no religion about it, and therefore he extolled it. It is scientific knowledge, he said, that explains why efforts after liberty in unenlightened centuries are so fleeting, and so deeply stained by bloodshed. "Compare these with the happy efforts of America and France; observe even in the same century, but at different epochs, the two revolutions of England fanatical and England enlightened. We see on the one side contemporaries of Prynne and Knox, while crying out that they are fighting for heaven and liberty, cover their unhappy country with blood in order to cement the tyranny of the hypocrite Cromwell; on the other, the contemporaries of Boyle and Newton establish with pacific wisdom the freest constitution in the world."[1] It is not wonderful that his own revolution was misunderstood by one who thus loved English Whigs, but hated English Republicans; who could forgive an aristocratic faction grasping power for their order, but who could not sympathise with a nation rising and smiting its oppressor, where they smote in the name of the Lord and of Gideon, nor with a ruler who used his power with noble simplicity in the interests of his people, and established in the heart of the nation a respect for itself such as she has never known since, simply because this ruler knew nothing about *principes* or the Rights of Man.

II

The course of events after 1774 is in its larger features well known to every reader. Turgot nominated Condorcet to be Inspector of Coinage, an offer which Condorcet deprecated in these words: "It is said of you in certain quarters that money costs you nothing when there is any question of obliging

[1] *Éloge de Franklin*, iii. 422.

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your friends. I should be bitterly ashamed of giving any semblance of foundation to these absurd speeches. I pray you, do nothing for me just now. Though not rich, I am not pressed for money. Entrust to me some important task—the reduction of measures for instance; then wait till my labours have really earned some reward." [1] In this patriotic spirit he undertook, along with two other eminent men of science, the task of examining certain projects for canals that engaged the attention of the minister. "People will tell you," he wrote, "that I have got an office worth two hundred and forty pounds. Utterly untrue. We undertook it out of friendship for M. Turgot; but we refused the payment that was offered." [2]

Turgot was dismissed (May 1776), and presently Necker was installed in his place. Condorcet had defended with much vigour and some asperity the policy of free internal trade in corn against Necker, who was for the maintenance of the restrictions on commercial intercourse between the different provinces of the kingdom. Consequently, when the new minister came into office, Condorcet wrote to Maurepas resigning his post. "I have," he said, "declared too decidedly what I think about both M. Necker and his works, to be able to keep any place that depends upon him." [3] This was not the first taste that Maurepas had had of Condorcet's resolute self-respect. The Duke de la Vrillière, one of the most scandalous persons of the century, was an honorary member of the Academy, and he was the brother-in-law of Maurepas. It was expected from the perpetual secretary that he should compose a eulogy upon the occasion of his death, and Condorcet was warned by friends not to irritate the powerful minister by a slight upon his relation. He was inflexible. "Would you rather have me persecuted," he asked, "for a wrong than for

[1] *Œuvres*, i. 71. [2] *Ibid.* i. 73, 74. [3] *Ibid.* i. 296.

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something just and moral? Think, too, that they will pardon my silence much more readily than they would pardon my words, for my mind is fixed not to betray the truth." [1]

In 1782 Condorcet was elected into the Academy. His competitor was Bailly, over whom he had a majority of one. The true contest lay less between the two candidates than between D'Alembert and Buffon, who on this occasion are said to have fought one of the greatest battles in the not peaceful history of the Academy. D'Alembert is said to have exclaimed that he was better pleased at winning that victory than he would have been to find out the squaring of the circle.[2] Destiny, which had so pitiful a doom in store for the two candidates of that day, soon closed D'Alembert's share in these struggles of the learned and in all others. He died in the following year, and by his last act testified to his trust in the generous character of Condorcet. Having by the benevolence of a lifetime left himself on his death-bed without resources, he confided to his friend's care two old and faithful servants, for whom he was unable to make provision. This charge the philosopher accepted cheerfully, and fulfilled to the end with pious scrupulosity. Even Condorcet's too declamatory manner only adds a certain dignity to the pathetic passage with which he closes the noble *éloge* on his lost friend.[3] Voltaire had been dead these five years, and Turgot, too, was gone. Society offered the survivor no recompense. He found the great world tiresome and frivolous, and he described its pursuits as "dissipation without pleasure, vanity without meaning, and idleness without repose." It was perhaps to soften

[1] *Œuvres*, i. 78.

[2] *Ibid.* i. 89. Condorcet had 16 votes, and Bailly 15. "*Jamais aucune élection*," says La Harpe, who was all for Buffon, "*n'avait offert ni ce nombre ni ce partage.*"—*Philos. du 18ième siècle*, i. 77. A full account of the election, and of Condorcet's reception, is given in Grimm's *Corr. lit.* xi. 50-56.

[3] *Œuvres*, iii. 109, 110.

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the oppression of these tender regrets that in 1786 Condorcet married.[1]

During the winter of 1788–89, while all France was astir with elections and preparation for elections for the meeting of the States-General that was looked to as the nearing dawn after a long night, Condorcet thought he could best serve the movement by calling the minds of the electors to sides of their duty which they might be in danger of overlooking. One of the subjects on which he felt most strongly, but on which his countrymen have not shown any particular sensibility, was slavery and the slave trade.[2] With terseness and force he appealed to the electors, while they were reclaiming their own rights in the name of justice, not to forget the half-million blacks, whose rights had been still more shamefully torn away from them, and whose need of justice was more urgent than their own. In the same spirit he published a vehement and ingenious protest against the admission of representatives from the St. Domingo plantations to the National Assembly.

Condorcet knew men well enough to be aware of the hazards of political inexperience. Beware of choosing a clever knave, he said, because he will follow his own interest and not yours; but at the same time beware of choosing a man for no better reason than that he is honest, because you need ability quite as much as you need probity. Do not choose a man who has ever taken sides against the liberty of any portion of mankind; nor one whose principles were never known until he found out that

[1] His wife, said to be one of the most beautiful women of her time, was twenty-three years younger than himself, and survived until 1822. Cabanis married another sister, and Marshal Grouchy was her brother. Madame Condorcet wrote nothing of her own, except some notes to a translation which she made of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

[2] Montesquieu, Raynal, and one or two other writers, had attacked slavery long before, and Condorcet published a very effective piece against it in 1781 (*Réflexions sur l'esclavage des nègres; Œuvres*, vii. 63), with an epistle dedicated to the enslaved blacks. About the same time an Abolition Society was formed in France, following the example set in England.

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he wanted your votes. Be careful not to mistake heat of head for heat of soul; because what you want is not heat but force, not violence but steadfastness. Be careful, too, to separate a man's actions from the accidents of his life; for one may be the enemy or the victim of a tyrant without being the friend of liberty. Do not be carried away by a candidate's solicitations: but, at the same time, make allowance for the existing effervescence of spirits. Prefer those who have decided opinions, to those who are always inventing plans of conciliation; those who are zealous for the rights of man, to those who only profess pity for the misfortunes of the people; those who speak of justice and reason, to those who speak of political interests and of the prosperity of commerce. Distrust those who appeal to sentiment in matters that can be decided by reason; prefer light to eloquence; and pass over those who declare themselves ready to die for liberty, in favour of those who know in what liberty consists.[1]

Though many of these precepts designed to guide the electors in their choice of men are sagacious and admirable, they smack strongly of that absolute and abstract spirit which can never become powerful in politics without danger. It is certain that in the spring of 1789, Condorcet held hereditary monarchy to be most suitable to "the wealth, the population, the extent of France, and to the political system of Europe."[2] Yet the reasons which he gives for thinking this are not very cogent. It is significant, however, of the little distance which all the most uncompromising and thoughtful revolutionists saw in front of them, that even Condorcet should, so late as the eve of the assembly of the States-General, have talked about attachment to the forms of monarchy and respect for the royal person and

[1] *Lettres d'un gentilhomme aux messieurs du Tiers État*, ix. 255-259.
[2] *Réflexions sur les pouvoirs et instructions à donner par les provinces à leurs députés aux États-Généraux*, ix. 266.

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prerogative; and should have represented the notion of the property of the church undergoing any confiscation, as an invention of the enemies of freedom.[1] Before the year was out, the property of the church had undergone confiscation; before two years had gone he was an ardent republican; and in less than twelve months after that he had voted the guilt of the king.

It is worth while to cite here a still more pointed example of the want of prevision, so common and so intelligible at that time. Writing in July 1791, he confutes those who asserted that an established and limited monarchy was a safeguard against a usurper, whose power is only limited by his own audacity and address, by pointing out that the extent of France, its divisions into departments, the separation between the various branches of the administration, the freedom of the press, the multitude of the public prints, were all so many insurmountable barriers against a French Cromwell. "To anybody who has read with attention the history of the usurpation of Cromwell, it is clear that a single newspaper would have been enough to stop his success. It is clear that if the people of England had known how to read other books beside their Bible, the hypocritical tyrant, unmasked from his first step, would soon have ceased to be dangerous." Again, is the nation to be cajoled by some ambitious general, gratifying its desire to be an empire-race? "Is this what is asked by true friends of liberty, those who only seek that reason and right should have empire over men? *What provinces, conquered by a French general, will he despoil to buy our suffrages? Will he promise our soldiers, as the consuls promised the citizens of Rome, the pillage of Spain or of Syria?* No, assuredly; it is because we cannot be an empire-nation that

[1] *Réflexions sur les pouvoirs et instructions à donner par les provinces à leurs députés aux États-Généraux*, ix. 264.

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we shall remain a free nation."[1] How few years between this conclusive reasoning, and the pillage of Italy, the campaign in Syria, the seizure of Spain!

Condorcet was not a member of the assembly in whose formation and composition he had taken so vivid and practical an interest. The first political functions he was invited to undertake were those of a member of the municipality of Paris. In the tremendous drama of which the scenes were now opening, the Town-hall of Paris was to prove itself far more truly the centre of movement and action than the Constituent Assembly. The efforts of the Constituent Assembly to build up were tardy and ineffectual.

Politicians of real eminence as reformers possess one of three elements. One class of men is inspired by an intellectual attachment to certain ideas of justice and right reason: another is moved by a deep pity for the hard lot of the mass of every society: while the third, such men as Richelieu, for example, has an instinctive passion for wise and orderly government. The great typical ruler is moved in varying degrees by all three in modern times, when the claims of the poor, the rank and file of the social army, have been raised to the permanent place that belongs to them. Each of the three types has its own peculiar conditions of success, and there are circumstances in which some one of the three is more able to grapple with the obstacles to order than either of the other two. It soon became very clear that the intellectual quality was not the element likely to quell the tempest that had now arisen.

Condorcet, however, showed himself no pedantic nor fastidious trifler with the tremendous movement which he had contributed to set afoot. The same practical spirit which drove him into the strife guided him in the midst of it. He never wrung

[1] *Réflexions sur les pouvoirs et instructions à donner par les provinces à leurs députés aux États-Généraux*, xii. 228, 229, 234.

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his hands, nor wept, nor bewailed the unreason of the multitudes to whom in vain he preached. He did not abandon the cause of the Revolution because his suggestions were often repulsed. "It would be better," he said to the Girondins, "if you cared less for personal matters and attended only to public interests." Years ago, in his *éloge* on L'Hôpital, he had praised the famous Chancellor for incurring the hostility of both of the two envenomed factions, League and Huguenots, and for disregarding the approbation or disapprobation of the people. "What operation," he asked, "capable of producing any durable good, can be understood by the people? How should they know to what extent good is possible? How judge of the means of producing it? It must ever be easier for a charlatan to mislead the people, than for a man of genius to save it."[1] Remembering this law, he never lost patience. He was cool and intrepid, if his intrepidity was of the logical sort rather than physical; and he was steadfast to one or two simple aims, if he was on some occasions too rapid in changing his attitude as to special measures. He was never afraid of the spectre, as the incompetent revolutionist is. On the contrary, he understood its whole internal history; he knew what had raised it, what passion and what weakness gave to it substance, and he knew that presently reason would banish it and restore men to a right mind. The scientific spirit implanted in such a character as Condorcet's, and made robust by social meditation, builds up an impregnable fortitude in the face of incessant rebuffs and discouragements. Let us then picture Condorcet as surveying the

[1] *Œuvres*, iii. 533. As this was written in 1777, Condorcet was perhaps thinking of Turgot and Necker. Of the latter, his daughter tells us repeatedly, without any consciousness that she is recording a most ignominious trait, that public approbation was the very breath of his nostrils, the thing for which he lived, the thing without which he was wretched.—See vol. i. of Madame de Staël's *Considérations*.

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terrific welter from the summer of 1789 to the summer of 1793, from the taking of the Bastille to the fall of the Girondins, with something of the firmness and self-possession of a Roman Cato.

After the flight of the king in June, and his return in what was virtually captivity to Paris, Condorcet was one of the party, very small in numbers and entirely discountenanced by public opinion, then passing through the monarchical and constitutional stage, who boldly gave up the idea of a monarchy and proclaimed the idea of a Republic. In July (1791) he published a piece strongly arguing for a negative answer to the question whether a king is necessary for the preservation of liberty.[1] It was proposed at that time to appoint Condorcet to be governor to the young dauphin. But Condorcet in this piece took such pains to make his sentiments upon royalty known, that in the constitutional frame of mind in which the Assembly then was, the idea had to be abandoned. It was hardly likely that a man should be chosen for such an office, who had just declared the public will to be "that the uselessness of a king, the needfulness of seeking means of displacing a power founded on illusions, should be one of the first truths offered to his reason; the obligation of concurring in this himself, one of the first of his moral duties; and the desire not to be freed from the yoke of law by an insulting inviolability, the first sentiment of his heart. People are well aware that at this moment the object is much less how to mould a king, than to teach him not to wish to be one."[2] As all France was then bent on the new constitution, a king included, Condorcet's republican assurance was hardly warranted, and it was by no means well received.

[1] *Œuvres*, iii. 227. It was followed by a letter, nominally by a young mechanic, offering to construct an automaton sovereign, like Kempel's chess-player, who would answer all constitutional purposes perfectly.—*Ibid.* iii. 239-241.

[2] *Ibid.* xii. 286.

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III

When the Constitution was accepted and the Legislative Assembly came to be chosen, Condorcet proved to have made so good an impression as a municipal officer, that the Parisians returned him for one of their deputies. The Declaration of Pilnitz in August 1791 had mitigated the loyalty that had even withstood the trial of the king's flight. When the Legislative Assembly met, it was found to contain an unmistakable element of republicanism with marked strength. Condorcet was chosen one of the secretaries, and he composed most of those multitudinous addresses in which this least honoured of all parliamentary chambers tried to prove to the French people that it was actually in existence and at work. Condorcet was officially to the Legislative what Barrère afterwards was to the Convention. But his addresses are turgid, labouring, and not effective for their purpose. They have neither the hard force of Napoleon's proclamations, nor the flowery eloquence of the Anacreon of the Guillotine.

Perhaps, after all, nobody else could have done better. The situation of the Assembly, between a hostile court and a suspicious and distrustful nation, and unable by its very nature to break the bonds, was from the beginning desperate. In December 1791 the Legislative through its secretary informs France of the frankness and loyalty of the king's measures in the face of the menaces of foreign war.[1] Within eight months, when the king's person was in captivity and his power suspended, the same secretary has to avow that from the very beginning the king had treated the Assembly with dissimulation, and had been in virtual league with the national enemies. The documents issued by the Assembly after the violent events of the Tenth of August 1792 are not edifying, and imply in

[1] *Déclaration de l'Assemblée Nationale*, Dec. 29, 1791. *Œuvres*, xii. 25.

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Condorcet, who composed them, a certain want of eye for revolutionary methods. They mark the beginning of that short but most momentous period in the history of the Revolution, when formulas, as Carlyle says, had to be stretched out until they cracked—a process truly called, "especially in times of swift change, one of the sorrowfullest tasks poor humanity has." You might read the *Exposition of the Motives from which the National Assembly have proclaimed the Convention, and suspended the Executive Power of the King*,[1] without dreaming that it is an account of a revolution that arose out of distrust or contempt for the Assembly; that had driven the king away from his palace and from power, and had finally annihilated the very chamber that was thus professing to expound its motives for doing what the violence of Paris had really done in defiance of it. The power, in fact, was all outside the chamber, in Danton and the Commune. A few days after this occurred the massacres of prisoners in September—scenes very nearly, if not quite, as bloody and iniquitous as those that attended the suppression of the rebellion by English troops in Ireland six years afterwards.

When the Convention was chosen, the electors of Paris rejected Condorcet. He was elected, however (Sept. 6), for the department of the Aisne, having among his colleagues in the deputation Tom Paine, and — a much more important personage — the youthful Saint-Just, who was so soon to stupefy the Convention by exclaiming, with mellow voice and face set immovable as bronze: "An individual has no right to be either virtuous or celebrated in your eyes. A free people and a national assembly are not made to admire anybody." The electors of the department of the Aisne had unconsciously sent two typical revolutionists: the man of intellectual ideas, and the man of passion heated as in the pit. In

[1] 13th August 1792. *Œuvres*, x. 547.

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their persons the Encyclopaedia and the Guillotine met. Condorcet, who had been extreme in the Legislative, but found himself a moderate in the Convention, gave wise counsel as to the true policy towards the new members: "Better try to moderate them than quarrel." But in this case, not even in their ruin, were fire and water reconciled.

On the first great question that the Convention had to decide—the fate of the king—Condorcet voted on the two main issues that the king was guilty of conspiring against liberty, and for the punishment of exile in preference to that of death. On the intermediate issue, whether the decision of the Convention should be final, or should be submitted to the people for ratification, he voted as a wise man should hardly have done, in favour of an appeal to the people. Such an appeal must inevitably have led to violent and bloody local struggles, and laid France open to the enemy. It is striking that, though Condorcet thus voted that the king was guilty, he had previously laid before the Convention a most careful argument to show that they were neither morally nor legally competent to try the king at all. How, he asked, without violating every principle of jurisprudence, can you act at the same time as legislators constituting the crime, as accusers, and as judges? His proposal was that Louis XVI. should be tried by a tribunal whose jury and judges should be named by the electoral body of the departments.[1] With all respect for Condorcet's anxiety that the conditions of justice should be rigorously observed—for, as he said, "there is no liberty in a country where positive law is not the single rule of judicial proceedings"—it is difficult to see why the Convention, coming as it did fresh from the electoral bodies, who must have had the question what was to be done with the

[1] *Opinion sur le jugement de Louis XVI.* November 1792. *Œuvres*, xii. 267-308.

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imprisoned king foremost in their minds, why the members of the Convention should not form as legitimate a tribunal as any body whose composition and authority they had themselves defined and created, and which would be chosen by the very same persons who less than a month before had invested them with their own offices.

It is highly characteristic of Condorcet's tenacity of his own view of the Revolution and of its methods, that on the Saturday (January 19, 1793) when the king's fate was decided against Condorcet's conviction and against his vote—the execution taking place on the Monday morning—he should have appealed to the Convention, at all events to do their best to neutralise the effect of their verdict upon Europe, by instantly initiating a series of humane reforms in the law, among them including the abolition of the punishment of death. "The English ministers," he cried, "are now seeking to excite that nation against us. Do you suppose that they will venture to continue their calumnious declamations, when you can say to them: 'We have abolished the penalty of death, while you still preserve it for the theft of a few shillings. You hand over debtors to the greed or spite of their creditors; our laws, wiser and more humane, know how to respect poverty and misfortune. Judge between us and you, and see to which of the two peoples the reproach of inhumanity may be addressed with most justice.'?"[1]

Condorcet, along with Tom Paine, Sieyès, and others, was a member of the first committee for framing a constitution. They laboured assiduously from September to February 1793, when the project was laid upon the table, prefaced by an elaborate dissertation of Condorcet's composition. The time was inauspicious. The animosities between the Girondins and the Mountain were becoming every

[1] 19th January 1793. *Œuvres*, xii. 311.

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day more furious. In the midst of this storm, Condorcet—at one moment wounding the Girondins by reproaches against their egotism and personalities, at another exasperating the Mountain by declaring of Robespierre that he had neither an idea in his head nor a feeling in his heart—still pertinaciously kept crying out for the acceptance of his constitution. It was of no avail. The revolution of the second of June came, and swept the Girondins out of the Chamber. Condorcet was not among them, but his political days were numbered. "What did you do all that time?" somebody once asked of a member of the Convention, during the period which was now beginning and which lasted until Thermidor in 1794. "I lived," was the reply. Condorcet was of another temper. He cared as little for his life as Danton or Saint-Just cared for theirs. Instead of cowering down among the men of the Plain or the frogs of the Marsh, he withstood the Mountain to the face.

Hérault de Séchelles, at the head of another committee, brought in a new constitution which was finally adopted and decreed (June 24, 1793). Of this, Sieyès said privately, that it was "a bad table of contents." Condorcet denounced it publicly, and declared in so many words that the arrest of the Girondins had destroyed the integrity of the national representation. The Bill he handled with a severity that inflicted keen smarts on the self-love of its designers. A few days later, the capucin Chabot, one of the weak and excitable natures that in ordinary times divert men by the intensity, multiplicity, and brevity of their enthusiasms, but to whom the fiercer air of a revolution is a real poison, rose and in the name of the Committee of General Security called the attention of the Chamber to what he styled a sequel of the Girondist Brissot. This was Condorcet's document criticising the new constitution. "This man,"

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said Chabot, "has sought to raise the department of the Aisne against you, imagining that, because he has happened to sit by the side of a handful of *savants* of the Academy, it is his duty to give laws to the French Republic." [1] So a decree was passed putting Condorcet under arrest. His name was included in the list of those who were tried before the Revolutionary Tribunal on the Third of October for conspiring against the unity and indivisibility of the Republic. He was condemned in his absence, and declared to be *hors la loi*.

This, then, was the calamitous close of his aspirations from boyhood upwards to be permitted to partake in doing something for the common weal. He had still the work to perform by which posterity will best remember his name, though only a few months intervened between his flight and his cruel end. Friends found a refuge for him in the house of a Madame Vernet, a widow in moderate circumstances, who let lodgings to students. "Is he an honest and virtuous man?" she asked; "in that case let him come, and lose not a moment. Even while we talk he may be seized." The same night Condorcet entrusted his life to her keeping, and for nine months remained in hiding under her roof. When he heard of the execution of the Girondins condemned on the same day with himself, he perceived the risk to which he was subjecting his protectress, and made up his mind to flee. "I am an outlaw," he said, "and if I am discovered you will be dragged to the same death." "The Convention," Madame Vernet answered, with something of the heroism of more notable women of that time, "may put you out of the law; it has not the power to put you out of humanity. You stay." This was no speech of the theatre. The whole household kept vigorous watch over the prisoner thus generously detained, and month after month Madame

[1] *Extrait du Moniteur. Œuvres*, xii. 677.

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Vernet's humane firmness was successful in preventing his escape. This time—his soul grievously burdened by anxiety for the fate of his wife and child, and by a restless eagerness not to compromise his benefactress, a bloody death staring him every moment in the face—Condorcet spent in the composition, without the aid of a single book, of his work on the progress of the human mind. Among the many wonders of an epoch of portents, this feat of intellectual abstraction is not the least amazing.

When his task was accomplished, Condorcet felt with more keenness than ever the deadly peril in which his presence placed Madame Vernet. He was aware that to leave her house was to seek death. He drew up a paper of directions to be given one day to his little daughter, when she should be of years to understand and follow them. She is above all things to banish from her mind every revengeful sentiment against her father's enemies; to distrust her filial sensibility, and to make this sacrifice for her father's own sake. This done, he marched downstairs, and having by an artful stratagem thrown Madame Vernet off her guard, he went out at ten o'clock in the morning imperfectly disguised into the street. This was the fifth of April 1794. By three in the afternoon, exhausted by fatigue which his strict confinement made excessive, he reached the house of a friend in the country, and prayed for a night's shelter. His presence excited less pity than alarm. The people gave him refreshment, and he borrowed a little pocket copy of Horace, with which he went forth into the night. He promised himself shelter amid the stone quarries of Clamart.

The door of the house in the rue Servandoni was left on the latch night and day for a whole week. But Madame Vernet's generous hope was in vain; while she still hoped and watched, the end had come. On the evening of the seventh, Condorcet,

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with one of his legs torn or broken, his garments in rags, with visage gaunt and hunger-stricken, entered an inn in the hamlet of Clamart, and called for an omelette. Asked how many eggs he would have in it, the famishing man answered a dozen. Carpenters, for such he had given himself to be, do not have a dozen eggs in their omelettes. Suspicion was aroused, his hands were not the hands of a workman, and he had no papers to show, but only the pocket Horace. The villagers seized him and hastened to drag him, bound hand and foot, to Bourg-la-Reine, then called for a season Bourg-l'Égalité. On the road he fainted, and they set him on a horse offered by a pitying wayfarer. When they reached the prison, Condorcet, starving, bleeding, way-worn, was flung into his cell. On the morrow, when the gaolers came to seek him, they found him stretched upon the ground, dead and stark. So he perished—of hunger and weariness, say some; of poison ever carried by him in a ring, say others.[1]

An eminent man, who escaped by one accident from the hatchets of the Septembriseurs, and by another from the guillotine of the Terror, while in hiding and in momentary expectation of capture and death, wrote thus in condemnation of suicide, "the one crime which leaves no possibility of return to virtue." "Even at this incomprehensible moment"—the spring of 1793—"when morality, enlightenment, energetic love of country, only render death at the prison-wicket or on the scaffold more inevitable; when it might be allowable to choose among the ways of leaving a life that can no longer be preserved, and to rob tigers in human form of the accursed pleasure of dragging you forth and drinking your blood; yes, on the fatal tumbril itself,

[1] The abbé Morellet, in his narrative of the death of Condorcet (*Mémoires*, c. xxiv.), says that he died of poison, a mixture of stramonium and opium. He adds that the surgeon described death as due to apoplexy. See Musset-Pathay's *J.-J. Rousseau*, ii. 42.

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with nothing free but voice, I could still cry, *Take care*, to a child that should come too near the wheel: perhaps he may owe his life to me, perhaps the country shall one day owe its salvation to him." [1]

It has long been the fashion among the followers of that reaction which Coleridge led and Carlyle spread and popularised, to dwell exclusively on the coldness and hardness, the excess of scepticism and the defect of enthusiasm, that are supposed to have characterised the eighteenth century. Because the official religion of the century both in England and France was lifeless and mechanical, it has been taken for granted that the level of thought and feeling was a low one universally; as if the highest moods of every era necessarily clothed themselves in religious forms. The truth is that, working in such natures as Condorcet's, the principles of the eighteenth century, its homage to reason and rational methods, its exaltation of the happiness of men, not excluding their material well-being, into the highest place, its passion for justice and law, its large illumination, all engendered a fervour as truly religious as that of Catholicism or of Calvinism at their best, while its sentiment was infinitely less interested and personal.

IV

The shape of Condorcet's ideas upon history arose from the twofold necessity which his character imposed upon him, at once of meeting his aspirations on behalf of mankind, and of satisfying a disciplined and scientific intelligence. He could not find adequate gratification in the artificial construction of hypothetical utopias. Conviction was as indispensable as hope; and distinct grounds for the faith that was in him, as essential as the faith

[1] Dupont de Nemours. *Les Physiocrates*, i. 326.

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itself. The result of this fact of mental constitution, the intellectual conditions of the time being what they were, was the rise in his mind of the great and central conception of there being a law in the succession of social states, to be ascertained by an examination of the collective phenomena of past history. The merit of this admirable effort, and of the work in which it found expression, is very easily underrated, because the effort was insufficient and merely preparatory, while modern thought has already carried us far beyond it, and at least into sight of the more complete truths to which this effort only pointed the way. Let us remember, however, that it did point the way distinctly and unmistakably. A very brief survey of the state of history as a subject of systematic study enables us to appreciate with precision what service it was that Condorcet rendered, for it carries us back from the present comparatively advanced condition of the science of society to a time before his memorable attempt, when conceptions now become so familiar were not in existence, and when even the most instructed students of human affairs no more felt the need of a scientific theory of the manner in which social effects follow social causes, than the least instructed portion of the literary public feels such a need in our own time. It is difficult after a subject has been separated from the nebulous mass of unclassified knowledge, after it has taken independent shape, and begun to move in lines of its own, to realise the process by which all this was effected, or the way in which before all this the facts concerned presented themselves to the thinker's mind. That we should overcome the difficulty is one of the conditions of our being able to do justice to the great army of the precursors.

Two movements of thought went on in France during the middle of the eighteenth century, that have been comparatively little dwelt upon by

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historians; their main anxiety has been to justify the foregone conclusion, so gratifying alike to the partisans of the social reaction and to the disciples of modern transcendentalism in its many disguises, that the eighteenth century was almost exclusively negative, critical, and destructive. Each of these two currents was positive, and their influence undeniably constructive, if we consider that it was from their union into a common channel, a work fully accomplished first in the mind of Condorcet, that the notion of the scientific treatment of history and society took its earliest start.

The first of the two movements consisted in the remarkable attempts of Quesnay and his immediate followers to withdraw the organisation of society from the sphere of empiricism, and to substitute for the vulgar conception of arbitrary and artificial institutions as the sole foundation of this organisation, the idea that there is a certain Natural Order, conformity to which in all social arrangements is the essential condition of their being advantageous to the members of the social union. Natural Order in the minds of this school was no metaphysical figment evolved from uninstructed consciousness, but a set of circumstances to be discovered by continuous and methodical observation. It consisted of physical and moral law. Physical law is the regulated course of every physical circumstance in the order evidently most advantageous to the human race. Moral law is the rule of every human action in the moral order, conformed to the physical order evidently most advantageous to the human race. This order is the base of the most perfect government, and the fundamental rule of all positive laws; for positive laws are only such laws as are required to keep up and maintain the natural order that is evidently most advantageous to the race.[1]

[1] Quesnay; *Droit naturel*, ch. v. *Les Physiocrates*, i. 52.

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Towards the close of the reign of Louis XIV. the frightful impoverishment of the realm attracted the attention of one or two enlightened observers, and among them of Boisguillebert and Vauban. They had exposed, the former of them with especial force and amplitude, the absurdity of the general system of administration. It seemed to have been devised for the express purpose of paralysing both agriculture and commerce, and exhausting all the sources of the national wealth.[1] But these speculations had been mainly fiscal, and pointed little further than to a readjustment of taxation and an improvement in the modes of its collection. The disciples of the New Science, as it was called, the Physiocrats, or believers in the supremacy of Natural Order, went much beyond this, and in theory sought to lay open the whole ground of the social fabric. Practically they dealt with scarcely any but economic circumstances, though some of them mix up with their reasonings upon commerce and agriculture crude and incomplete hints upon forms of government and other questions that belong not to the economical but to the political side of social science.[2] Quesnay's famous *Maxims* open with a declaration in favour of the unity of the sovereign authority, and against the system of counterbalancing forces in government. Almost immediately he passes on to the ground of political economy, and elaborates the conditions of material prosperity in an agricultural realm. Their peculiar distinction in the present connection is the grasp which they had of the principle of there being a natural, and therefore a scientific, order in social conditions; that order being natural in the sense they attached to the

[1] *Économistes financiers du 18ième Siècle.* Vauban's *Projet d'une dîme royale* (p. 33), and Boisguillebert's *Factum de la France*, etc. (p. 248 *et seq.*).

[2] De la Rivière, for instance, very notably. Cf. his *Ordre naturel des sociétés politiques. Physiocrates*, ii. 469, 636, etc. See also Baudeau on the superiority of the Economic Monarchy. *Ibid.* pp. 783-791.

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term, which from the circumstances of the case is most beneficial to the race. From this point of view they approach the problems of what is now classified as social statics; and they assume, without consciousness of another aspect being possible, that the society which they are discussing is in a state of equilibrium.

It is evident that with this restriction of the speculative horizon, they were and must remain wholly unable to emerge into the full light of the completely constituted science of society, with laws of movement as well as laws of equilibrium, with definite methods of interpreting past and predicting future states. They could account for and describe the genesis of the social union, as Plato and Aristotle had in different ways been able to do; and they could prescribe some of the conditions of its being maintained in vigour and compactness. Some of them could even see in a vague way the interdependence of peoples and the community of the real interests of different nations, each nation, as De la Rivière expressed it, being only a province of the vast kingdom of nature, a branch from the same trunk as the rest.[1] What they could not see was the social evolution; and here too, in the succession of social states, there has been a natural and observable order. In a word, they tried to understand society without the aid of history. Consequently they laid down the truths which they discovered as absolute and fixed, when they were no more than conditional and relative.

Fortunately, inquirers in another field had set a movement afoot that was destined to furnish the supplement of their own speculation. This was the remarkable development of the conception of history, which Montesquieu's two memorable books first made conspicuous. Bossuet's well-known discourse on universal history, teeming as it does with

[1] *Ordre nat. des soc. pol.* p. 526.

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religious prejudice, just as Condorcet's sketch teems with prejudice against religion, had perhaps partially introduced the spirit of Universality into the study of history. But it was impossible from the nature of the case for any theologian to know fully what this spirit means; and it was not until the very middle of the following century that any effective approach was made to that universality which Bossuet did little more than talk about. Then it came not from theology, but from the more hopeful sources of a rational philosophy. Before Montesquieu no single stone of the foundation of scientific history can be said to have been laid. Of course, far earlier writers had sought after the circumstances that brought about a given transaction. Thucydides, for example, had attributed the cause of the Peloponnesian war to the alarm of the Lacedaemonians at the greatness of the power of Athens.[1] It is this sense of the need of explanation, however rudimentary, that distinguishes the great historian from the chronicler, even from a superior chronicler like Livy, who in his account of so great an event as the Second Punic War plunges straightway into narrative of what happened, without concern why it happened. Tacitus had begun his *Histories* with remarks upon the condition of Rome, the feeling of the various armies, the attitude of the provinces, so that, as he says, "*non modo casus eventusque rerum, qui plerumque fortuiti sunt, sed ratio etiam causaeque noscantur.*"[2] But these and the like instances in historical literature were only political explanations, more or less adequate, of particular transactions; they were no more than the sagacious remarks of men with statesmanlike minds, upon the origin of some single set of circumstances.

The rise from this to the high degree of generality that marks the speculations of Montesquieu,

[1] Bk. i. 23. [2] *Hist.* i. 4.

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empirical as they are, was as great as the rise from the mere maxims of worldly wisdom to the widest principles of ethical philosophy. Polybius, indeed, in the remarkable chapters with which his *Histories* open, uses expressions that are so modern as almost to startle us. "People who study history," he says, "in separate and detached portions, without reference to one another, and suppose that from them they acquire a knowledge of the whole, are like a man who in looking on the severed members of what had once been an animated and comely creature, should think that this was enough to give him an idea of its beauty and force when alive. The empire of Rome was what by its extent in Italy, Africa, Asia, Greece, brought history into the condition of being organic (σωματοειδής)." His object was to examine the general and collective ordering of events; when it came into existence; whence it had its source; how it had this special completion and fulfilment — the universal empire of Rome.[1] Striking as this is, there is not in it any real trace of the abstract conception of social history. Polybius recognises the unity of history, so far as that could be understood in the second century before Christ, but he treats his subject in the concrete, describing the chain of events without attempting to seek their law. It was Montesquieu who first applied the comparative method to social institutions; who first considered physical conditions in connection with the laws of a country; who first perceived and illustrated how that natural order which the Physiocrats only considered in relation to the phenomena of wealth and its production, really extended over its political phenomena as well; who first set the example of viewing a great number of social facts all over the world in groups and classes; and who first definitely and systematically inquired into the causes of a set of

[1] Polyb. *Hist.* I. iii. 4; iv. 8, 7.

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complex historical events and institutions, as being both discoverable and intelligible. This was a marked advance upon both of the ideas, by one or other of which men had previously been content to explain to themselves the course of circumstances in the world; either the inscrutable decrees of a non-human providence, or the fortuitous vagaries of an eyeless destiny.

It was Turgot, however, who completed the historical conception of Montesquieu, in a piece written in 1750, two years after the appearance of the *Esprit des lois*, and in one or two other fragmentary compositions of about the same time, not the less remarkable because the writer was only twenty-three years old. Vico in Italy had insisted on the doctrine that the course of human affairs is in a cycle, and that they move in a constant and self-repeating orbit.[1] Turgot, on the contrary, with more wisdom, at the opening of his subject is careful to distinguish the ever-varying spectacle of the succession of men from generation to generation, from the circle of identical revolutions in which the phenomena of nature are enclosed. In the one case time only restores at each instant the image of what it has just caused to disappear; in the other, the reason and the passions are ever incessantly producing new events. "All the ages are linked together by a succession of causes and effects which bind the state of the world to all the states that have gone before. The multiplied signs of speech and writing, in supplying men with the means of an assured possession of their thoughts and of communicating them to one another, have formed a common treasure that one generation transmits to another, as an inheritance constantly augmented by the discoveries of each generation; and the human

[1] The well-known words of Thucydides may contain the germ of the same idea, when he speaks of the future as being likely to represent again, after the fashion of human things, "if not the very image, yet the near resemblance of the past." Bk. i. 22. 4.

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race, looked at from its origin, appears in the eyes of the philosopher one immense whole, which, just as in the case of each individual, has its infancy and its growth."[1]

Pascal and others in ancient and modern times[2] had compared in casual and unfruitful remarks the history of the race to the history of the individual, but Turgot was able in some sort to see the full meaning and extent of the analogy, as well as the limitations proper to it, and to draw from it some of the larger principles which the idea involved. The first proposition in the passage just quoted, that a chain of causes and effects unites each age with every other age that has gone before, is one of the most memorable sentences in the history of thought. And Turgot not only saw that there is a relation of cause and effect between successive states of society; he had glimpses into some of the conditions of that relation. To a generation that stands on loftier heights his attempts seem rudimentary and strangely simple, but it was these attempts that cut the steps for our ascent. How is it, he asked, for instance, that the succession of social states is not uniform? that they follow with unequal step along the track marked out for them? He found the answer in the inequality of natural advantages, and he was able to discern the necessity of including in these advantages the presence, apparently accidental, in some communities and not in others, of men of especial genius or capacity in some important direction.[3] Again, he saw that just as in one way natural advantages accelerate the progress of a society, in another natural obstacles also accelerate it, by stimulating men to the efforts necessary to overcome them: *le besoin perfectionne l'instrument.*[4] The importance of following the

[1] *Discours en Sorbonne. Œuvres de Turgot*, ii. 597. (Ed. of 1844.)
[2] Cf. Sir G. C. Lewis's *Methods of Observation in Politics*, ii. 439, note.
[3] *Œuvres de Turgot*, ii. 599, 645, etc. [4] *Ibid.* ii. 601.

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march of the human mind over all the grooves along which it travels to further knowledge, was fully present to him, and he dwells repeatedly on the constant play going on between discoveries in one science and those in another. In no writer is there a fuller and more distinct sense of the essential unity and integrity of the history of mankind, nor of the multitude of the mansions into which this vast house is divided, and the many keys which he must possess that would open and enter in.

Even in empirical explanations Turgot shows a breadth and accuracy of vision truly surprising, considering his own youth and the youth of his subject. The reader will be able to appreciate this, and to discern at the same time the arbitrary nature of Montesquieu's method, if he will contrast, for example, the remarks of this writer upon polygamy with the far wider and more sagacious explanation of the circumstances of such an institution given by Turgot.[1] Unfortunately, he has left us only short and fragmentary pieces, but they suggest more than many large and complete works. That they had a very powerful and direct influence upon Condorcet there is no doubt, as well from the similarity of general conception between him and Turgot, as from the nearly perfect identity of leading passages in their writings. Let us add that in Turgot's fragments we have what is unhappily not a characteristic of Condorcet, the peculiar satisfaction and delight in scientific history of a style that states a fact in such phrases as serve also to reveal its origin, bearings, significance, in which every successive piece of description is so worded as to be self-evidently a link in the chain of explanation, an ordered term in a series of social conditions.

Before returning to Condorcet we ought to glance

[1] *Esprit des lois*, xvi. cc. 2-4. And *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, in Turgot's Works, ii. 640, 641. For a further account of Turgot's speculations, see article "Turgot" in the present volume.

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at the remarkable piece, written in 1784, in which Kant propounded his idea of a universal or cosmo-political history, which, contemplating the agency of the human will upon a large scale, should unfold to our view a regular stream of tendency in the great succession of events.[1] The will, metaphysically considered, Kant said, is free, but its manifestations, that is to say, human actions, "are as much under the control of universal laws of nature as any other physical phenomena."

The very same course of incidents, which taken separately and individually would have seemed perplexed and incoherent, "yet viewed in their connection and as the action of the human *species* and not of independent beings, never fail to observe a steady and continuous, though slow, development of certain great predispositions in our nature." As it is impossible to presume in the human race any *rational* purpose of its own, we must seek to observe some *natural* purpose in the current of human actions. Thus a history of creatures with no plan of their own, may yet admit a systematic form as a history of creatures blindly pursuing a plan of nature. Now we know that all predispositions are destined to develop themselves according to their final purpose. Man's rational predispositions are destined to develop themselves in the species and not in the individual. History, then, is the progress of the development of all the tendencies laid in man by nature. The method of development is the antagonism of these tendencies in the social state, and its source the *unsocial sociality* of man—a tendency to enter the social state, combined with a perpetual resistance to that tendency, which is ever threatening to dissolve it. The play of these two tendencies unfolds talents of

[1] *Idea of a Universal History on a Cosmo-Political Plan.* It was translated by De Quincey, and is to be found in vol. xiii. of his collected works, pp. 188-152.

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every kind, and by gradual increase of light a preparation is made for such a mode of thinking as is capable of "exalting a social concert that had been *pathologically* extorted from the mere necessities of situation, into a *moral* union founded on the reasonable choice." Hence the highest problem for man is the establishment of a universal civil society, founded on the empire of political justice; and "the history of the human species as a whole may be regarded as the unravelling of a hidden plan of nature for accomplishing a perfect state of civil constitution for society in its internal relations (and, as the condition of that, in its external relations also), as the sole state of society in which the tendencies of human nature can be all and fully developed." Nor is this all. We shall not only be able to unravel the intricate web of past affairs, but shall also find a clue for the guidance of future statesmen in the art of political prediction. Nay, more, this clue "will open a consolatory prospect into futurity, in which at a remote distance we shall observe the human species seated upon an eminence won by infinite toil, where all the germs are unfolded that nature has implanted within it, and its destination on this earth accomplished."

That this conception involves an assumption about tendencies and final purposes which reverses the true method of history, and moreover reduces what ought to be a scientific inquiry to be a foregone justification of nature or providence, should not prevent us from appreciating its signal merits in insisting on a systematic presentation of the collective activity of the race, and in pointing out, however cursorily, the use of such an elucidation of the past in furnishing the grounds of practical guidance in dealing with the future and in preparing it. Considering the brevity of this little tract, its pregnancy and suggestiveness have not

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often been equalled. We have seen enough of it here to enable us to realise the differences between this and the French school. We miss the wholesome objectivity resulting from the stage which had been reached in France by the physical sciences. Condorcet's series of *éloges* shows unmistakably how deep an impression the history of physical discovery had made upon him, and how clearly he understood the value of its methods. The peculiar study which their composition had occasioned him is of itself almost enough to account for the fact that a conception that had long been preparing in the superior minds of the time, should fully develop itself in him rather than in anybody else.

V

The Physiocrats had introduced the idea of there being a natural order in social circumstances, that order being natural which is most advantageous to mankind. Turgot had declared that one age is bound to another by a chain of causation. Condorcet fused these two conceptions. He viewed the history of the ages as a whole, and found in their succession a natural order; an order that, when uninterrupted and undisturbed, tended to accumulate untold advantages upon the human race; that was every day becoming more plain to the vision of men, and therefore every day more and more assured from disturbance by ignorant prejudice and sinister interests. There is an order at once among the circumstances of a given generation, and among the successive sets of circumstances in successive generations. "If we consider the development of human faculties in its results, so far as they relate to the individuals who exist at the same time on a given space, and if we follow that development from generation to generation, then we have before us the picture of the progress

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of the human mind. This progress is subject to the same general laws that are to be observed in the development of the faculties of individuals, for it is the result of that development, considered at the same time in a great number of individuals united in society. But the result that presents itself at any one instant depends upon that which was offered by the instants preceding; in turn it influences the result in times still to follow."

This picture will be historical, inasmuch as being subject to perpetual variations it is formed by the observation, in due order, of different human societies in different epochs through which they have passed. It will expose the order of the various changes, the influence exercised by each period over the next, and thus will show in the modifications impressed upon the race, ever renewing itself in the immensity of the ages, the track that it has followed, and the exact steps that it has taken towards truth and happiness. Such observation of what man has been and of what he is, will then lead us to means proper for assuring and accelerating the fresh progress that his nature allows us to anticipate still further.[1]

Thus Condorcet's purpose was not to justify nature, as it had been with Kant, but to search in the past for rational grounds of a belief in the splendour of men's future destinies. His view of the character of the relations among the circumstances of the social union, either at a given moment or in a succession of periods, was both accurate and far-sighted. When he came actually to execute his own great idea, and to specify the manner in which those relations arose and operated, he instantly diverged from the right path. Progress in his mind is exclusively produced by improvement in intelligence. It is the necessary result of man's activity in the face of that disproportion ever existing

[1] *Tableau des progrès de l'esprit humain.* *Œuvres*, vi. 12, 13.

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between what he knows and what he desires and feels the necessity to know.[1] Hence the most fatal of the errors of Condorcet's sketch. He measures only the contributions made by nations and eras to what we know; leaving out of sight their failures and successes in the elevation of moral standards and ideals, and in the purification of human passions.

One seeks in vain in Condorcet's sketch for any account of the natural history of western morals, or for any sign of consciousness on his part that the difference in ethical discipline and feeling between the most ferocious of primitive tribes and the most enlightened eighteenth-century Frenchmen, was a result of evolution that needed historical explanation, quite as much as the difference between the astrolatry of one age and the astronomy of another. We find no recognition of the propriety of recounting the various steps of that long process by which, to use Kant's pregnant phrase, the relations born of pathological necessity were metamorphosed into those of moral union. The grave and lofty feeling, for example, which inspired the last words of the *Tableau*—whence came it? Of what long-drawn chain of causes in the past was it the last effect? It is not enough to refer us generally to previous advances in knowledge and intellectual emancipation, because even supposing the successive modifications of our moral sensibilities to be fundamentally due to the progress of intellectual enlightenment, we still want to know in the first place something about the influences that harness one process to the other, and in the second place, something about the particular directions these modifications of moral constitution have taken.

If this is one very radical omission in Condorcet's scheme, his angry and vehement aversion for the various religions of the world (with perhaps one

[1] *Œuvres*, vi. 21.

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exception) is a sin of commission still more damaging to its completeness. An unfavourable view of the influences upon human development of the Christian belief, even in its least corrupt forms, was not untenable. Nay, he was at liberty to go further than this, and to depict religion as a natural infirmity of the human mind in its immature stages, just as there are specific disorders incident in childhood to the human body. Even on this theory, he was bound to handle it with the same gravity that he would have expected to find in a pathological treatise by a physician. Who would write of the sweating sickness with indignation, or describe zymotic diseases with resentment? Condorcet's pertinacious anger against theology is just as irrational as this would be, from the scientific point of view which he pretends to have assumed.

From the earliest times to the latest it is all one story according to Condorcet. He can speak with respect of philosophies even when, as in the case of the Scotch school of the eighteenth century, he dislikes and condemns them.[1] Of religion his contempt and hatred only vary slightly in degree. Barbarous tribes have sorcerers, trading on the gross superstitions of their dupes: so in other guise and with different names have civilised nations to-day. As other arts progressed, superstition, too, became less rude; priestly families kept all knowledge in their own hands, and thus preserved their hypocritical and tyrannical assumptions from detection. They disclosed nothing to the people without supernatural admixture, the better to maintain their personal pretensions. They had two doctrines, one for themselves, and the other for the people. Sometimes, as they were divided into several orders, each of them reserved to itself certain mysteries. Thus all the inferior orders were at once rogues and dupes, and the great system of hypocrisy was only

[1] *Œuvres*, vi. 186.

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known in all its completeness to a few adepts. Christianity belonged to the same class. Its priests, we must admit, "in spite of their knaveries and their vices, were enthusiasts ready to perish for their doctrines." In vain did Julian endeavour to deliver the empire from the scourge. Its triumph was the signal for the incurable decay of all art and knowledge. The church may seem to have done some good in things where her interests did not happen to clash with the interests of Europe, as in helping to abolish slavery, for instance; but after all "circumstances and manners" would have produced the result necessarily and of themselves. Morality, which was taught by the priests only, contained those universal principles that have been unknown to no sect; but it created a host of purely religious duties and imaginary sins. These duties were more rigorously enjoined than those of nature, and actions that were indifferent, legitimate, or even virtuous, were more severely rebuked and punished than real crimes. Yet, on the other hand, a moment of repentance, consecrated by the absolution of a priest, opened the gates of heaven to the worst miscreants.[1]

It is obvious that Condorcet was unfitted by his temper, and the school to which he most belonged, from accepting religion as a fact in the history of the human mind that must have some positive explanation. To look at it in this way as the creation of a handful of selfish impostors in each community, was to show a radical incompetence to carry out the scheme that had been so scientifically projected. The picture is ruined by the angry caricature of what ought to have been one of the most important figures in it. Never perhaps was there so thorough an inversion of the true view of the comparative elevation of different parts of human character, as is implied in Condorcet's strange hint that Cromwell's

[1] *Œuvres*, vi. pp. 85, 55, 101, 102, 111, 117, 118, etc.

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satellites would have been much better men if they had carried instead of the Bible at their saddle-bows some merry book of the stamp of Voltaire's *Pucelle*.[1]

Apart from the misreading of history in explaining religion by the folly of the many and the frauds of a few, Condorcet's interpretation involved the profoundest infidelity to his own doctrine of the intrinsic purity and exaltation of human nature. This doctrine ought in all reason to have led him to look for the secret of the popular acceptance of beliefs that to him seemed most outrageous, in some possibly finer side which they might possess for others, appealing not to the lower but to the higher qualities of a nature with instincts of perfection. Take his account of Purgatory. The priests, he says, drew up so minute and comprehensive a table of sins that nobody could hope to escape from censure. Here you come upon one of the most lucrative branches of the sacerdotal trafficking; people were taught to imagine a hell of limited duration, which the priests only had the power to abridge; and this grace they sold, first to the living, then to the kinsmen and friends of the dead.[2] Now it was surely more worthy of a belief in the natural depravity than in the natural perfectibility of the sons of Adam, thus to assume without parley or proviso a base mercenariness on the one hand, and grovelling terror on the other, as the origin of a doctrine which was obviously susceptible of a kinder explanation. Would it not have been more consistent with belief in human goodness to refer the doctrine to a merciful and affectionate and truly humanising anxiety to assuage the horrors of what is perhaps the most frightful idea that has ever corroded human character, the idea of eternal punishment? We could in part have

[1] See Condorcet's vindication of the *Pucelle* in his *Life of Voltaire*. *Œuvres*, iv. 88, 89. See also Comte's *Phil. pos.* v. 450.
[2] *Œuvres*, vi. 118.

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pardoned Condorcet if he had striven to invent ever so fanciful origins for opinions and belief in his solicitude for the credit of humanity. As it is, he distorts the history of religion only to humanity's discredit. How, if the people were always predisposed to virtue, were priests, sprung of the same people and bred in the same traditions, so invariably and incurably devoted to baseness and hypocrisy? Was the nature of a priest absolutely devoid of what physicians call recuperative force, restoring him to a sound mind, in spite of professional perversion? In fine, if man had been so grossly enslaved in moral nature from the beginning of the world down to the year 1789 or thereabouts, how was it possible that notwithstanding the admitted slowness of civilising processes, he should suddenly spring forth the very perfectible and nearly perfected being that Condorcet passionately imagined him to be?[1]

It has already been hinted that there was one partial exception to Condorcet's animosity against religion. This was Mahometanism. Towards this his attitude is fully appreciative, though of course he deplores the superstitions that mixed themselves up with the Arabian prophet's efforts for purification. After the seven vials of fiery wrath have been poured out upon the creed of Palestine, it is refreshing to find the creed of Arabia almost patronised and praised. The writer who could not have found in his heart to think Gregory the Great or Hildebrand other than a mercenary impostor, nor Cromwell other than an ambitious hypocrite, admits with exquisite blandness of Mahomet that

[1] As Comte says in his remarks on Condorcet (*Phil. pos.* iv. 185-193): "*Le progrès total finalement accompli ne peut être sans doute que le résultat général de l'accumulation spontanée des divers progrès partiels successivement réalisés depuis l'origine de la civilisation, en vertu de la marche successivement lente et graduelle de la nature humaine*"; so that Condorcet's picture presents a standing miracle, "*où l'on s'est même interdit d'abord la ressource vulgaire de la Providence.*" Comte's criticism, however, seems to leave out of sight what full justice Condorcet did to the various partial advances in the intellectual order.

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he had the art of employing all the means of subjugating men *avec adresse, mais avec grandeur*.[1] Another reason, no doubt, besides his hatred of the church, lay at the bottom of Condorcet's tolerance or more towards Mahometanism. The Arabian superstition was not fatal to knowledge; Arabian activity in algebra, chemistry, optics, and astronomy atoned in Condorcet's eyes for the Koran.

It is fair to add further, that Condorcet showed a more just appreciation of the effects of Protestantism upon western development than has been common among French thinkers. He recognises that men who had learnt, however imperfectly, to submit their religious prejudices to rational examination, would naturally be likely to extend the process to political prejudices also. Moreover, if the reformed churches refused to render to reason all its rights, still they agreed that its prison should be less narrow; the chain was not broken, but it ceased to be either so heavy or so short as it had been. And in countries where what was by the dominant sect insolently styled tolerance, succeeded in establishing itself, it was possible to maintain the tolerated doctrines with a more or less complete freedom. So there arose in Europe a sort of freedom of thought, not for men, but for Christians; and, "if we except France, it is only for Christians that it exists anywhere else at the present day," a limitation which has now fortunately ceased to be altogether exact.

If we have smiled at the ease with which what is rank craftiness in a Christian, is toned down into address in a Mahometan, we may be amused too at the leniency that describes some of the propagandist methods of the eighteenth century. Condorcet becomes rapturous as he tells with what admixture of the wisdom of the serpent the humane philo-

[1] *Œuvres*, vi. 120-128.

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sophers of his century "covered the truth with a veil that prevented it from hurting too weak sight, and left the pleasure of conjecturing it; caressing prejudices with address, to deal them the more certain blows; scarcely ever threatening them, nor ever more than one at once, nor even one in its integrity; sometimes consoling the enemies of reason by pretending to desire no more than a half-tolerance in religion and half-liberty in politics; conciliating despotism while they combated the absurdities of religion, and religion when they rose against despotism; attacking these two scourges in their principle, even when they seemed only to bear ill-will to revolting or ridiculous abuses, and striking these poisonous trees in their very roots, while they appeared to be doing no more than pruning crooked branches."[1] Imagine the holy rage with which such acts would have been attacked, if Condorcet had happened to be writing about the Jesuits. Unfortunately, the serene composure of the historical conscience was as unknown to him as it is always to orthodox apologists. It is to be said, moreover, that he had less excuse for being without it, for he rested on the goodness of men, and not, as theologians rest, on their defects.

One or two detached remarks are suggested by Condorcet's picture, that it may be worth while to make. He is fully alive, for example, to the importance to mankind of the appearance among them of one of those men of creative genius, like Archimedes or like Newton, whose lives constitute an epoch in human history. Their very existence he saw to be among the greatest benefits conferred on the race by Nature. He hardly seems to have been struck, on the other hand, with the appalling and incessant waste of these benefits; with the number of men of Newtonian capacity who are

[1] *Œuvres*, vi. 187-189.

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born into the world only to chronicle small beer; with the hosts of high souls who labour and flit away like shadows, perishing in the accomplishment of minor and subordinate ends. We may suspect that the notion of all this immeasurable profusion of priceless treasures, its position as one of the laws of the condition of man on the globe, would be unspeakably hard of endurance to one holding Condorcet's peculiar form of optimism.

Again, it would be worth while to examine some of the acute and ingenious hints which Condorcet throws out by the way. It would be interesting to consider, as he suggests, the influence upon the progress of the human mind of the change from writing on such subjects as science, philosophy, and jurisprudence in Latin, to the usual language of each country. That change rendered the sciences more popular, but it increased the trouble of the scientific men in following the general march of knowledge. It caused a book to be read in one country by more men of inferior competence, but less read throughout Europe by men of superior light. And though it relieves men who have no leisure for extensive study from the trouble of learning Latin, it imposes upon profounder persons the necessity of learning a variety of modern languages.[1]

VI

Our expectations for the future, Condorcet held, may be reduced to these three points: the destruction of inequality among nations; the progress of equality among the people of any given nation; and, finally, the substantial perfecting (*perfectionnement réel*) of man.

I. With reference to the first of these aspirations, it will be brought about by the abandonment

[1] *Œuvres*, vi. 163.

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among European peoples of their commercial monopolies, their treacherous practices, their mischievous and extravagant proselytising, and their sanguinary contempt for those of another colour or another creed. Vast countries, now a prey to barbarism and violence, will present in one region numerous populations only waiting to receive the means and instruments of civilisation from us, and as soon as they find brothers in the Europeans, will joyfully become their friends and pupils; and in another region, nations enslaved under the yoke of despots or conquerors, crying aloud for liberators. In yet other regions, it is true, there are tribes almost savage, cut off by the harshness of their climate from a perfected civilisation, or else conquering hordes, ignorant of every law but violence and every trade but brigandage. The progress of these last two descriptions of people will naturally be more tardy, and attended by more storm and convulsion. It is possible even that, reduced in number, in proportion as they see themselves repulsed by civilised nations, they will end by insensibly disappearing.[1] It is perhaps a little hard to expect Esquimaux or the barbaric marauders of the sandy expanses of Central Asia insensibly to disappear, lest by their cheerless presence they should destroy the unity and harmony of the transformation scene in the grand drama of Perfectibility.

II. The principal causes of the inequality that unfortunately exists among the people of the same community are three: inequality in wealth; inequality of condition between the man whose means of subsistence are both assured and transmissible, and him for whom these means depend upon the duration of his working life; thirdly, inequality of instruction. How are we to establish a continual tendency in these three sources

[1] *Œuvres*, pp. 239-244.

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of inequality to diminish in activity and power? To lessen, though not to demolish, inequalities in wealth, it will be necessary for all artificial restrictions and exclusive advantages to be removed from fiscal or other legal arrangements, by which property is either acquired or accumulated: and among social changes tending in this direction will be the banishment by public opinion of an avaricious or mercenary spirit from marriage. Again, inequality between permanent and precarious incomes will be radically modified by the development of the application of the calculation of probabilities to life. The extension of annuities and insurance will not only benefit many individuals, but will benefit society at large by putting an end to that periodical ruin of a large number of families, which is such an ever-renewing source of misery and degradation. Another means to the same end will be found in discovering, by the same doctrine of probabilities, some other equally solid base for credit instead of a large capital, and for rendering the progress of industry and the activity of commerce more independent of the existence of great capitalists. Something approaching to equality of instruction, even for those who can only spare a few of their early years for study, and in after times only a few hours of leisure, will become more attainable by improved selection of subjects, and improved methods of teaching them. The dwellers in one country will cease to be distinguished by the use of a rude or of a refined dialect; and this, it may be said in passing, was sometimes thought to be the result of the school system in the United States. One portion of them will no longer be dependent upon any other for guidance in the smallest affairs. We cannot obliterate nor ignore natural differences of capacity, but after public instruction has been properly developed, "the difference will be between men

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of superior enlightenment, and men of an upright character who feel the value of light without being dazzled by it; between talent or genius, and that good sense which knows how to appreciate and to enjoy both." [1]

III. What are the changes that we may expect from the substantial perfecting of human nature and society? The progress of agricultural science will make the same land more productive, and the same labour more efficient. Nay, who shall predict what the art of converting elementary substances into food for our use may one day become? The constant tendency of population to advance to the limits of the means of subsistence thus amplified will be checked by a rising consciousness in men, that if they have obligations in respect of creatures still unborn, these obligations consist in giving them, not existence but happiness, in adding to the well-being of the family, and not cumbering the earth with useless and unfortunate beings. This changed view upon population will partly follow from the substitution of rational ideas for those prejudices which have penetrated morals with an austerity that is corrupting and degrading.[2] The movement will be further aided by one of the most important steps in human progress—the destruction, namely, of the prejudices that have established inequality of rights between the two sexes, and which are so mischievous even to the sex that seems to be most favoured. We seek in vain for any justification of such an inequality in difference of physical organisation, in force of intelligence, or in moral sensibility. It has no other origin than abuse of strength, and it is to no purpose that attempts are made to excuse it by sophisms.[3]

[1] *Œuvres*, pp. 244-251. [2] *Ibid.* pp. 257, 258.

[3] Condorcet, we know, thought the indissolubility of marriage a monstrously bad thing, but the grounds which he gives for his thinking so would certainly lead to the infinite dissolubility of society. See a passage

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Among other improvements under our third head will be the attainment of greater perfection in language, leading at once to increased accuracy and increased concision. Laws and institutions, following the progress of knowledge, will be constantly undergoing modifications tending to identify individual with collective interests. Wars will grow less frequent with the extinction of those ideas of hereditary and dynastic rights, that have occasioned so many bloody contests. The art of learning will be facilitated by the institution of a Universal Language; and the art of teaching by resort to Technical Methods, or systems which unite in orderly arrangement a great number of different objects, so that their relations are perceived at a single glance.[1]

Finally, progress in medicine, the use of more wholesome food and healthy houses, the diminution of the two most active causes of deterioration, namely, misery and excessive wealth, must prolong the average duration of life, as well as raise the tone of health while it lasts. The force of transmissible diseases will be gradually weakened, until their quality of transmission vanishes.

The rapidity and the necessary incompleteness with which Condorcet threw out in isolated hints his ideas of the future state of society, impart to his conception a certain mechanical aspect, which conveys an incorrect impression of his notion of the sources whence social change must flow. His admirable, careful remarks upon the moral training of children prove him to have been as far removed as possible from any of those theories of the formation of character which merely prescribe the imposition of moulds and casts from without,

in the *Fragment on the Tenth Epoch*, vi. 523-526. See also some curious words in a letter to Turgot, i. 221, 222.

[1] *Œuvres*, pp. 269-272.

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instead of carefully tending the many spontaneous and sensitive processes of growth within.

With machinery and organisation Condorcet did not greatly concern himself; probably too little rather than too much. The central idea of all his aspirations was to procure the emancipation of reason, free and ample room for its exercise, and improved competence among men in the use of it. The subjugation of the modern intelligence beneath the disembodied fancies of the grotesque and sombre imagination of the Middle Ages, did not offend him more than the idea of any fixed organisation of the spiritual power, or any final and settled and universally accepted solution of belief and order would have done. With De Maistre and Comte the problem was the organised and systematic reconstruction of an anarchic society. With Condorcet it was how to persuade men to exert the individual reason methodically and independently, not without co-operation, but without anything like official or other subordination. His cardinal belief and precept was, as with Socrates, that the βίος ἀνεξέταστος is not to be lived by man. As we have seen, the freedom of the reason was so dear to him, that he counted it an abuse for a parent to instil his own convictions into the defenceless minds of his young children. This was the natural outcome of Condorcet's mode of viewing history as the record of intellectual emancipation, while to Comte its deepest interest was as a record of moral and emotional cultivation. If we value in one type of thinker the intellectual conscientiousness, which refrains from perplexing men by propounding problems unless the solution can be set forth also, perhaps we owe no less honour in the thinker of another type to that intellectual self-denial which makes him very careful lest the too rigid projection of his own specific conclusions should by any means obstruct the access of a single

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ray of fertilising light. This religious scrupulosity, which made him abhor all interference with the freedom and openness of the understanding as the worst kind of sacrilege, was Condorcet's eminent distinction. If, as some think, the world will gradually transform its fear or love of unknowable gods into a devout reverence for those who have stirred in men a sense of the dignity of their own nature and of its large and multitudinous possibilities, then will his name not fail of deep and perpetual recollection.

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THE CHAMPION OF SOCIAL REGRESS

I

Owing to causes lying tolerably near the surface, the remarkable Catholic reaction that took place in France at the beginning of the nineteenth century, has never received in England the attention it deserves; not only for its striking interest as an episode in the history of European thought, but also for its peculiarly forcible and complete presentation of those ideas with which what is called the modern spirit is supposed to be engaged in deadly war. For one thing, the Protestantism of England strips a genuinely Catholic movement of speculation of the pressing and practical importance which belongs to it in a country where nearly all spiritual sentiment that has received any impression of religion at all, unavoidably runs in Catholic forms. With us the theological reaction against the ideas of the eighteenth century was not and could not be other than Protestant. The defence and reinstatement of Christianity in each case was conducted, as might have been expected, with reference to the dominant creed and system of the country. If Coleridge had been a Catholic, his works thus newly coloured by an alien creed would have been read by a small sect only, instead of exercising, as they did, a wide influence over the whole nation, reaching people through those usual conduits of press and pulpit, by which the products of philosophic thought are conveyed to other than philosophic minds. As

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naturally in France, hostility to all those influences which were believed to have brought about the Revolution; to sensationalism in metaphysics; to atheism in what should have been theology; to the notion of sovereignty of peoples in politics, inevitably sought a rallying-point in a renewed allegiance to the prodigious spiritual system that had fostered the germs of order and social feeling in Europe, and whose name remains even now as the most permanent symbol and exemplar of stable organisation. Another reason for English indifference to this movement is the rapidity with which here, as elsewhere, dust gathers thickly round the memory of the champions of lost causes. Some of the most excellent of human characteristics — intensity of belief, and a fervid anxiety to realise aspirations — unite with some of the least excellent of them, to make us too habitually forget that, as Mill has so excellently said, the best adherents of a fallen standard in philosophy, in religion, in politics, are usually next in all good qualities of understanding and sentiment to the best of those who lead the van of the force that triumphs. Men are not so anxious as they should be, considering the infinite diversity of effort that goes to the advancement of mankind, to pick up the fragments of truth and positive contribution, that nothing be lost, and as a consequence the writings of antagonists with whom we are believed to have nothing in common, lie unexamined and disregarded.

In the case of the group of writers who, after a century of criticism, ventured once more with an intrepid confidence—differing fundamentally from the tone of preceding apologists in the Protestant camp, who were nearly as critical as the men they refuted—to vindicate not the bare outlines of Christian faith, but the entire scheme, in its extreme manifestation, of the most ancient of all Christian organisations, this apathy is very much to be

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regretted on several grounds. In the first place, it is impossible to see intelligently to the bottom of the momentous spirit of ultramontanism, which is so deep a difficulty of continental Europe, and, touching us in Ireland, is perhaps already one of our own deepest difficulties,—without comprehending in its best shape the theory on which ultramontanism rests. And this theory it is impossible to seize thoroughly, without some knowledge of the ideas of its most efficient defenders in its earlier years. Secondly, it is among these ideas that we have to look for the representation in their most direct, logical, uncompromising, and unmistakable form of those theological ways of regarding life and prescribing right conduct, whose more or less rapidly accelerated destruction is the first condition of the further elevation of humanity, as well in power of understanding as in morals and spirituality. In all contests of this kind there is the greatest and most obvious advantage in being able to see your enemy full against the light. Thirdly, in one or two respects, the Catholic reactionaries at the beginning of the nineteenth century insisted very strongly on principles of society which the general thought of the century before had almost entirely dropped out of sight, and which we who, in spite of many differences, still sail down the same great current, and are propelled by the same tide, are accustomed almost equally either to leave in the background of speculation, or else deliberately to deny and suppress. Such we may account the importance which they attach to organisation, and the value they set upon a common spiritual faith and doctrine as a social basis. That the form which the recognition of these principles is destined to assume, will at all correspond to their hopes and anticipations, is one of the most unlikely things possible. This, however, need not detract from the worth for our purpose of their exposition of the principles themselves. Again,

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the visible traces of the impression made by the writings of this school on the influential founder of the earliest Positivist system, are sufficiently deep and important to make some knowledge of them of the highest historical interest, both to those who accept and to those who detest the system.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were three chief schools of thought, the Sensational, the Catholic, and the Eclectic; or as it may be put in other terms, the Materialist, the Theological, and the Spiritualist. The first looked for the sources of knowledge, the sanction of morals, the inspiring fountain and standard of aesthetics, to the outside of men, to matter, and the impressions made by matter on the corporeal senses. The second looked to divine revelation, authority and the traditions of the Church. The third, steering a middle course, looked partly within and partly without, relied partly on the senses, partly on revelation and history, but still more on a certain internal consciousness of a direct and immediate kind, which is the supreme and reconciling judge of the reports alike of the senses, of history, of divine revelation.[1] Each of these schools had many exponents. The three most conspicuous champions of revived Catholicism were De Maistre, De Bonald, and Chateaubriand. The last of them, the author of the *Génie du Christianisme*, was effective in France because he is so deeply sentimental, but he was too little trained in speculation, and too little equipped with knowledge, to be fairly taken as the best intellectual representative of their way of thinking. De Bonald was of much heavier calibre. He really thought, while Chateaubriand only felt, and the *Législation primitive* and the *Pensées sur divers sujets* contain much that an enemy of the school

[1] See Damiron's *La Philosophie en France au XIXième siècle.* Introduction to vol. i. (Fifth edition.)

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will find it worth while to read, in spite of an artificial, and, so far as a foreigner may judge, a detestable style.

De Maistre was the greatest of the three, and deserves better than either of the others to stand as the type of the school. His style is so wonderfully lucid, that, notwithstanding the mystical, or, as he said, the illuminist side of his mind, we can never be in doubt about his meaning, and this is not by any means the case with De Bonald. To say nothing of his immensely superior natural capacity, De Maistre's extensive reading in the literature of his foes was a source of strength, that might indeed have been thought indispensable, if only other persons had not attacked the same people as he did, without knowing much, or anything at all, at first hand about them. Then he goes over the whole field of allied subjects, which we have a right to expect to have handled by anybody with a systematic view of the origin of knowledge, the meaning of ethics, the elements of social order and progressiveness, the government and scheme of the universe. Above all, his writings are penetrated with the air of reality and life, that comes of actual participation in the affairs of the world with which social philosophers have to deal. Lamennais had in many respects a finer mind than De Maistre, but the conclusions in which he was finally landed, no less than his liberal aims, prevent him from being an example of the truly Catholic reaction. He obviously represented the Revolution, or the critical spirit, within the Catholic limits, while De Maistre's ruling idea was, in his own trenchant phrase, "*absolument tuer l'esprit du dix-huitième siècle.*" On all these accounts he appears to be the fittest expositor of those conceptions which the anarchy that closed the eighteenth century provoked into systematic existence.

There can be little doubt that the effective way

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in which De Maistre propounded and vindicated his theory made a deep impression on the mind of Comte. Very early in his career he declared: "De Maistre has for me the peculiar property of helping me to estimate the philosophic capacity of people, by the repute in which they hold him." Among his other reasons at that time for thinking well of Guizot was that, notwithstanding Guizot's transcendent Protestantism, he complied with the test of appreciating De Maistre.[1] Comte's rapidly assimilative intelligence perceived that here at last there was a definite, consistent, and intelligible scheme for the reorganisation of European society, with him the great end of philosophic endeavour. Its principle of the division of the spiritual and temporal powers, and of the relation that ought to subsist between the two, was the base of Comte's own scheme. In general form the plans of social reconstruction are identical; in substance, it need scarcely be said, the differences are fundamental. The temporal power, according to Comte's design, is to reside with industrial chiefs, and the spiritual power to rest upon a doctrine scientifically established. De Maistre, on the other hand, believed that the old authority of kings and Christian pontiffs was divine, and any attempt to supersede it in either case would have seemed to him as desperate as impious.

II

Joseph de Maistre was born at Chambéry in the year 1754.[2] His family was the younger branch of a stock in Languedoc, which about the beginning of the seventeenth century divided itself into two, one remaining in France, the other establishing

[1] Littré, *Auguste Comte et la phil. posit.* p. 152.

[2] The facts of De Maistre's life I have drawn from a very meagre biography by his son, Count Rodolphe de Maistre, supplemented by two volumes of *Lettres et opuscules* (Fourth edition; Paris, Vaton. 1865), and a volume of his *Diplomatic Correspondence*, edited by M. Albert Blanc.

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itself in Piedmont. It is not wonderful that the descendants of the latter, settled in a country of small extent and little political importance, placed a high value on their kinship with an ancient line in the powerful kingdom of France. Joseph de Maistre himself was always particularly anxious to cultivate close relations with his French kinsfolk, partly from the old aristocratic feeling of blood, and partly from his intellectual appreciation of the gifts of the French mind, and its vast influence as an universal propagating power. His father held a high office in the government of Savoy, and enjoyed so eminent a reputation that on his death both the Senate and the King of Sardinia deliberately recorded their appreciation of his loss as a public calamity. His mother is said to have been a woman of lofty and devout character, and her influence over her eldest son was exceptionally strong and tender. He used to declare in after life that he was as docile in her hands as the youngest of his sisters. Among other marks of his affectionate submission to parental authority, we are told that during the whole time of his residence at Turin, where he followed a course of law, he never read a single book without previously writing to Chambéry to one or other of his parents for their sanction. Such traditions linger in families, and when he came to have children of his own, they too read nothing of which their father had not been asked to express his approbation. De Maistre's early education was directed by the Jesuits; and as might have been expected from the generous susceptibility of his temper, he never ceased to think of them with warm esteem. To the end of his life he remembered the gloom that fell upon the household, though he was not nine years old at the time, when the news arrived of the edict of 1764, abolishing the Society in the kingdom of France. One element of his education he commemorates in

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a letter to his favourite daughter. "Let your brother," he says, "work hard at the French poets. Let him learn them by heart, especially the incomparable Racine; never mind whether he understands him yet or not. I didn't understand him when my mother used to come repeating his verses by my bedside, and lulled me to sleep with her fine voice to the sound of that inimitable music. I knew hundreds of lines long before I knew how to read; and it is thus that my ears, accustomed betimes to this ambrosia, have never since been able to endure any sourer draught."

After his law studies at the University of Turin, then highly renowned for its jurisconsults, the young De Maistre went through the successive stages of an official career, performing various duties in the public administration, and possessing among other honours a seat in the Senate, over which his father presided. He led a tranquil life at Chambéry, then, as at all other times, an ardent reader and student. Unaided he taught himself five languages. English he mastered so perfectly, that though he could not follow it when spoken, he could read a book in that tongue with as much ease as if it had been in his own. To Greek and German he did not apply himself until afterwards, and he never acquired the same proficiency in them as in English, French, Italian, Latin, and Spanish. To be ignorant of German then, it will be remembered, was not what it would be now, to be without one of the literary senses.

Like nearly every other great soldier of reaction, he showed in his early life a decided inclination for new ideas. The truth that the wildest extravagances of youthful aspiration are a better omen of a vigorous and enlightened manhood than the decorous and ignoble faith in the perfection of existing arrangements, was not belied in the case of De Maistre. His intelligence was of too hard and exact

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a kind to inspire him with the exalted schemes that present themselves to those more nobly imaginative minds who dream dreams and see visions. He projected no Savoyard emigration to the banks of the Susquehanna or Delaware, to found millennial societies and pantisocratic unions. These generous madnesses belong to men of more poetic temper. Still, in spite of the deadening influences of officialism and relations with a court, De Maistre had far too vigorous and active a character to subside without resistance into the unfruitful ways of obstruction and social complacency. It is one of the most certain marks of a superior spirit, that the impulses earliest awakened by its first fresh contact with the facts of the outer world, are those that quicken a desire for the improvement of society, the increase of the happiness of men, the amelioration of human destiny. With this unwritten condition of human nature De Maistre, like other men of his mental calibre, complied. He incurred the suspicion and ill-will of most of those by whom he was immediately surrounded, by belonging to a Reform Lodge at Chambéry. The association was one of a perfectly harmless character, but being an association, it diffused a tarnishing vapour of social disaffection and insurgency over the names of all who ventured to belong to it, and De Maistre was pointed out to the Sardinian court as a man with leanings towards new things, and therefore one of whom it were well to beware. There was little ground for apprehension. When the menacing sounds of the approaching hurricane in France grew heavy in the air, the little lodge at Chambéry voluntarily dissolved itself, and De Maistre was deputed to convey to the king, Victor Amadeo III., the honourable assurance of its members that they had assembled for the last time.

In 1786, at the age of thirty-two, De Maistre had married, and when the storm burst that destroyed all the hopes of his life, he was the father of two

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children. In one of his gay letters to a venerable lady who was on intimate terms with them both, he has left a picture of his wife, which is all the more interesting for what it reveals of his own character. "The contrast between us two is the very strangest in the world. For me, as you may have found out, I am the *pococurante* senator, and above all things very free in saying what I think. She, on the contrary, will take care that it is noon before allowing that the sun has risen, for fear of committing herself. She knows what must be done or what must not be done on the tenth of October 1808, at ten o'clock in the morning, to avoid some inconvenience which otherwise would come to pass at midnight between the fifteenth and sixteenth of March 1810. 'But, my dear husband, you pay attention to nothing; you believe that nobody is thinking of any harm. Now I know, I have been told, I have guessed, I foresee, I warn you,' etc. 'Come now, my dear, leave me alone. You are only wasting your time: I foresee that I shall never foresee things: that's your business.' She is the supplement to me, and hence when I am separated from her, as I am now, I suffer absurdly from being obliged to think about my own affairs; I would rather have to chop wood all day. . . . My children ought to kiss her very steps; for my part, I have no gift for education. She has such a gift, that I look upon it as nothing less than the eighth endowment of the Holy Ghost; I mean a certain fond persecution by which it is given her to torment her children from morning to night to do something, not to do something, to learn—and yet without for a moment losing their tender affection for her. How can she manage it? I cannot make it out." She was laughingly called by himself and her friends, Madame Prudence. It is certain that few women have found more necessity for the qualities implied in this creditable nickname.

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They had not been married many years before they were overtaken by irreparable disaster. The French Revolution broke out, and Savoy was invaded by the troops of the new Republic. Count De Maistre, with his wife and children, fled from Chambéry across the Alps to Aosta. "*Ma chère amie*," he said to his wife, by the side of a great rock which he never afterwards forgot, "the step that we are taking to-day is irrevocable; it decides our lot for life"; and the presentiment was true. Soon the *Loi des Allobroges* was promulgated, which enjoined upon all who had left their homes in Savoy to return instantly, under pain of confiscation of all their property. It was the very depth of winter. Madame de Maistre was in the ninth month of her pregnancy. She knew that her husband would endure anything rather than expose her to the risks of a journey in such a season. So, urged by a desire to save something from the wreck of their fortune by compliance with the French decree, she seized the opportunity of her husband's absence at Turin, and started for Savoy without acquainting him with her design. She crossed the Great St. Bernard in the beginning of January on the back of a mule, accompanied by her two little children wrapped in blankets. The Count, on his return to Aosta two or three days afterwards, forthwith set off in her steps, in the trembling expectation of finding her dead or dying in some Alpine hovel. But the favour of fate and a stout heart brought her safe to Chambéry, where shortly afterwards she was joined by her husband. The authorities vainly tendered him the oath, vainly bade him inscribe his name on the register of citizens; and when they asked him for a contribution to support the war, he replied curtly that he did not give money to kill his brothers in the service of the King of Sardinia. As soon as his wife was delivered of their third child, whom he was destined not to see again for nearly

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twenty years, he quitted her side, abandoned his property and his country, and took refuge at Lausanne, where in time his wife and his two eldest children once more came to him.

Gibbon tells us how a swarm of emigrants, escaping from the public ruin, was attracted by the vicinity, the manners, and the language of Lausanne. "They are entitled to our pity," he reflected, "and they may claim our esteem, but they cannot in their present state of mind and fortune contribute much to our amusement. Instead of looking down as calm and idle spectators on the theatre of Europe, our domestic harmony is somewhat embittered by the infusion of party spirit." Gibbon died in London almost at the very moment when De Maistre arrived at Lausanne, but his account of things remained true, and political feuds continued to run as high as ever. Among the people with whom De Maistre was thrown was Madame de Staël. "As we had not been to the same school," he says, "either in theology or in politics, we had some scenes, enough to make one die of laughter; still without quarrelling. Her father, who was then alive, was the friend and relative of people that I love with all my heart, and that I would not vex for all the world. So I allowed the *émigrés* who surrounded us to cry out as they would, without ever drawing the sword." De Maistre thought he never came across a head so completely turned wrong as Madame de Staël's, the infallible consequence, as he took it to be, of modern philosophy operating upon a woman's nature. He once said of her: "Ah! if Madame de Staël had been Catholic, she would have been adorable, instead of famous." We can believe that his position among the French *émigrés* was not particularly congenial. For though they hated the Revolution, they had all drunk of the waters of the eighteenth-century philosophy, and De Maistre hated this philosophy worse

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than he hated the Revolution itself. Then again, they would naturally vapour about the necessities of strong government. "Yes," said the Savoyard exile, "but be quite sure that, to make the monarchy strong, you must rest it on the laws, avoiding everything arbitrary, too frequent commissions, and all ministerial jobberies." We may well believe how unsavoury this rational and just talk was to people who meant by strong government a system that should restore to them their old prerogatives of anti-social oppression and selfish corruption. The order that De Maistre vindicated was a very different thing from the deadly and depraving order that was the object of the prayers of incorrigible royalists around him.

After staying three years at Lausanne, De Maistre went to Turin, but shortly afterwards the Sardinian king, at the end of a long struggle, was forced to bend to the power of the French, then in the full tide of success. Bonaparte's brilliant Italian campaign needs no words here. The French entered Turin, and De Maistre, being an *émigré*, had to leave it. Furnished with a false passport, and undergoing a thousand hardships and dangers, he made his way, once more in the depth of a severe winter (1797), to Venice. He went part of the way down the Po in a small trading ship, crowded with ladies, priests, monks, soldiers, and a bishop. There was only one small fire on board, at which all the cooking had to be done, and where the unhappy passengers had to keep themselves warm as they could. At night they were confined each to a space about three planks broad, separated from neighbours by pieces of canvas hanging from a rope above. Each bank of the river was lined by military posts —the left by the Austrians, and the right by the French; and the danger of being fired into was constantly present to aggravate the misery of overcrowding, scanty food, and bitter cold. Even

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this wretchedness was surpassed by the hardships that confronted the exiles at Venice. The physical distress endured here by De Maistre and his unfortunate family exceeded that of any other period of their wanderings. He was cut off from the court, and from all his relations and friends, and reduced for the means of existence to a few fragments of silver plate that had somehow been saved from the universal wreck. This slender resource grew less day by day, and when it was exhausted the prospect was a blank. The student of De Maistre's philosophy may see in what crushing personal anguish some of its most sinister growths had their roots. When the cares of beggary come suddenly upon a man in middle life, they burn deep. Alone, and starving for a cause that is dear to him, he might encounter grim fate with a fortitude in which there should be many elevating and consoling elements. But the destiny is intolerably hard which condemns a man of humane mould, as De Maistre certainly was, to look helplessly on the physical pains of a tender woman and famishing little ones. The hour of bereavement has its bitterness, but the bitterness is gradually suffused with soft reminiscence. The grip of beggary leaves a mark on such a character as De Maistre's that no prosperity of after days effaces. The seeming inhumanity of his theory of life, that is so revolting to comfortable people like M. Villemain, was in truth the only explanation of his own cruel sufferings in which he could find any solace. It was not that he hated mankind, but his destiny looked as if God hated him, and this was a horrible moral complexity out of which he could only extricate himself by a theory in which pain and torment seem to stand out as the main facts in human existence.

To him, indeed, prosperity never came. Hope smiled on him momentarily, but, in his own words: "It was only a flash in the night." While he was

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in Venice, the armies of Austria and Russia reconquered the north of Italy, and Charles Emanuel IV., in the natural anticipation that the allies would at once restore his dominions, hastened forward. Austria, however, as De Maistre had seen long before, was indifferent, or even absolutely hostile, to Sardinian interests, and she successfully opposed Charles Emanuel's restoration. The king received, at Florence, the news of the perfidy of his nominal ally, but not until after he had made arrangements for rewarding the fidelity of some of his most loyal adherents.

It was from Florence that De Maistre accepted the king's nomination to the chief place in the government of the island of Sardinia. Through the short time of his administration here, he was overwhelmed with vexations only a little more endurable than the physical distresses that had weighed him down at Venice. During the war, justice had been administered in grossly irregular fashion. Hence, people had taken the law into their own hands, and retaliation had completed the round of wrong-doing. The taxes were collected with difficulty. The higher class exhibited an invincible repugnance to paying their debts. Some of these difficulties in the way of firm and orderly government were insuperable, and De Maistre vexed his soul in an unequal and only partially successful contest. In after years, amid the miseries of his life in Russia, he wrote to his brother thus: "Sometimes in moments of solitude that I multiply as much as I possibly can, I throw my head back on the cushion of my sofa, and there with my four walls around me, far from all that is dear to me, confronted by a sombre and impenetrable future, I recall the days when in a little town that you know well"—he meant Cagliari—"with my head resting on another sofa, and only seeing around our own exclusive circle (good heavens, what an

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impertinence!) little men and little things, I used to ask myself: 'Am I then condemned to live and die in this place, like a limpet on a rock?' I suffered bitterly; my head was overloaded, wearied, flattened, by the enormous weight of Nothing."

Presently a worse thing befell him. In 1802 he received an order from the king to proceed to St. Petersburg as envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary at the court of Russia. Even from this bitter proof of devotion to his sovereign he did not shrink. He had to tear himself from his wife and children, without any certainty when the cruel separation would end; to take up new functions which the circumstances of the time rendered unspeakably difficult; while the petty importance of the power he represented, and its mendicant attitude in Europe, robbed his position of the public distinction and dignity that may richly console a man for private sacrifice. It is a kind destiny that veils their future from mortal men. Fifteen years passed before De Maistre's exile came to a close. From 1802 to 1817 he did not quit the inhospitable latitudes of northern Russia.

His letters during this desolate period furnish a striking picture of his manner of life and his mental state. We see in them his most prominent characteristics. Not even the painfulness of the writer's situation ever clouds his intrepid and vigorous spirit. Lively and gallant sallies of humour to his female friends, sagacious judgments on the position of Europe to political people, bits of learned criticism for erudite people, tender and playful chat with his two daughters, all these alternate delightfully with one another. Whether he is writing to his little girl whom he has never known, or to the King of Sardinia, or to some author who sends him a book, or to a minister who has found fault with his diplomacy, there is in all

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alike the same constant and remarkable play of a bright and penetrating intellectual light, coloured by a humour that is now and then sardonic, but more often genial and lambent. There is a certain semi-latent quality of hardness lying at the bottom of De Maistre's style, both in his letters and in his more elaborate compositions. His writings seem to recall the flavour and bouquet of some of the fortifying and stimulating wines of Burgundy, from which time and warmth have not yet drawn out a certain native roughness that lingers on the palate. This hardness, if one must give the quality a name that only imperfectly describes it, sprang not from any original want of impressionableness or sensibility of nature, but partly from the relentless buffetings he had to endure at the hands of fortune, and partly from the preponderance that had been given to the rational side of his mind by long habits of sedulous and accurate study. Few men knew so perfectly as he knew how to be touching without ceasing to be masculine, or how to go down into the dark pits of human life without forgetting the broad sunlight, or how to keep habitually close to visible and palpable fact, while eagerly addicted to speculation. His contemplations were perhaps somewhat too near the ground; they led him into none of those sublimer regions of subtle feeling where the rarest human spirits have loved to travel; we do not think of his mind among those who have gone

Voyaging through strange seas of thought alone.

If this kind of temper, strong, keen, frank, and a little hard and mordant, brought him too near a mischievous disbelief in the dignity of men and their lives, at least it kept him well away from morbid weakness in ethics, and from beating the winds in metaphysics. But of this we shall see more in considering his public pieces, than can be gathered from his letters.

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The discomforts of De Maistre's life at St. Petersburg were extreme. The dignity of his official style and title was an aggravation of the exceeding straitness of his means. The ruined master could do little to mitigate the ruin of his servant. He had to keep up the appearance of an ambassador on the salary of a clerk. "This is the second winter," he writes to his brother in 1810, "that I have gone through without a pelisse, which is exactly like going without a shirt at Cagliari. When I come from court a very sorry lackey throws a common cloak over my shoulders." The climate suited him better than he had expected; and in one letter he vows that he was the only living being in Russia who had passed two winters without fur boots and a fur hat. It was considered indispensable that he should keep a couple of servants; so, for his second, De Maistre was obliged to put up with a thief, whom he rescued under the shelter of ambassadorial privilege from the hands of justice, on condition that he would turn honest. The Austrian ambassador, with whom he was on good terms, would often call to take him out to some entertainment. "His fine servants mount my staircase groping their way in the dark, and we descend preceded by a servant carrying *luminare minus quam ut praeesset nocti.*" "I am certain," he adds pleasantly, "that they make songs about me in their Austrian patois. Poor souls! it is well they can amuse themselves."

Sometimes he was reduced so far as to share the soup of his valet, for lack of richer and more independent fare. Then he was constantly fretted by enemies at home, who disliked his trenchant diplomacy, and distrusted the strength and independence of a mind that was too vigorous to please the old-fashioned ministers of the Sardinian court. These chagrins he took as a wise man should. They disturbed him less than his separation from his

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family. "Six hundred leagues away from you all," he writes to his brother, "the thoughts of my family, the reminiscences of childhood, transport me with sadness." Visions of his mother's saintly face haunted his chamber; almost gloomier still was the recollection of old intimates with whom he had played, lived, argued, and worked for years, and yet who now no longer bore him in mind. There are not many glimpses of this melancholy in the letters meant for the eye of his beloved *trinité féminine*, as he playfully called his wife and two daughters. "*A quoi bon vous attrister*," he asked bravely, "*sans raison et sans profit?*" Occasionally he cannot help letting out to them how far his mind is removed from composure. "Every day as I return home I find my house as desolate as if it were yesterday you left me. In society the same fancy pursues me, and scarcely ever quits me." Music, as might be surmised in so sensitive a nature, drove him almost beside himself with its mysterious power of intensifying the dominant emotion. "Whenever by any chance I hear the harpsichord," he says, "melancholy seizes me. The sound of the violin gives me such a heavy heart, that I am fain to leave the company and hasten home." He tossed in his bed at night, thinking he heard the sound of weeping at Turin, making a thousand efforts to picture to himself the looks of that "orphan child of a living father" whom he had never known, wondering if ever he should know her, and battling with a myriad of black phantoms that seemed to rustle in his curtains. "But you, M. de Chevalier," he said apologetically to the correspondent to whom he told these dismal things, "you are a father, you know the cruel dreams of a waking man; if you were not of the profession I would not allow my pen to write you this jeremiad." As De Maistre was accustomed to think himself happy if he got three hours' sound

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sleep in the night, these sombre and terrible vigils were ample enough to excuse him if he had allowed them to overshadow all other things. But the vigour of his intellect was too strenuous, and his curiosity and interest in every object of knowledge too inextinguishable. "After all," he said, "the only thing to do is to put on a good face, and to march to the place of torture with a few friends to console you on the way. This is the charming image under which I picture my present situation. Mark you," he added, "I always count books among one's consoling friends."

In one of the most gay and charming of his letters, apologising to a lady for the remissness of his correspondence, he explains that diplomacy and books occupy every moment. "You will admit, madam, there is no possibility of one's shutting up books entirely. Nay, more than ever, I feel myself burning with the feverish thirst for knowledge. I have had an access of it that I cannot describe to you. The most curious books literally run after me, and hurry to place themselves in my hands. As soon as diplomacy gives me a moment of breathing-time I rush headlong to that favourite pasture, to that ambrosia of which the mind can never have enough—

Et voilà ce qui fait que votre ami est muet."

He thinks himself happy if, by refusing invitations to dinner, he can pass a whole day without stirring from his house. "I read, I write, I study; for after all one must know something." In his hours of depression he fancied that he only read and worked, not for the sake of the knowledge, but to stupefy and tire himself out, if that were possible.

As a student De Maistre was indefatigable. He never belonged to the languid band who hope to learn difficult things by easy methods. The only way, he warned his son, is to shut your door, to say

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that you are not within, and to work. "Since they have set themselves to teach us how we ought to learn the dead languages, you can find nobody who knows them; and it is amusing enough that people who don't know them should be so obstinately bent on demonstrating the vices of the methods employed by us who do know them." He was one of the wise and laborious students who do not read without a pen in their hands. He never shrank from the useful toil of transcribing abundantly, from all the books he read, everything that could by any possibility eventually be of service to him in his inquiries. His notebooks were enormous. As soon as one of them was filled, he carefully made up an index of its contents, numbered it, and placed it on a shelf with its unforgotten predecessors. In one place he accidentally mentions that he had some thirty of these folios over the head of his writing-table.

"If I am a pedant at home," he said, "at least I am as little as possible a pedant out of doors." In the evening he would occasionally seek the society of ladies, by way of recovering some of the native gaiety of heart that had hitherto kept him alive. "I blow on this spark," to use his own words, "just as an old woman blows among the ashes to get a light for her lamp." A student and a thinker, De Maistre was also a man of the world, and he may be added to the long list of writers who have shown that to take an active part in public affairs, and mix in society, gives a peculiar life, reality, and force to both scholarship and speculation. It was computed at that time that the author of a philosophic piece could not safely count upon more than a hundred and fifty readers in Russia; and hence, we might be sure, even if we had not De Maistre's word for it, that away from his own house he left his philosophy behind. The vehemence of his convictions did not prevent him from being socially tolerant to others who hated them.

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"If I had the good fortune to be among his acquaintances," he wrote of a heretical assailant, "he would see that among the people with convictions it would be hard to find one so free from prejudice as I am. I have many friends among the Protestants, and now that their system is tottering, they are all the dearer to me." In spite of his scanty means, his shabby valet, his threadbare cloak, and his low diplomatic position, the fire and honesty of his character combined with his known ability to place him high in the esteem of the society of St. Petersburg. His fidelity, devotion, and fortitude, mellowed by many years and by meditative habits, and tinged perhaps by the patrician consciousness of birth, formed in him a modest dignity that men respected. They perceived it to be no artificial assumption, but the outward image of a high and self-respecting spirit. His brother diplomatists, even the representatives of France, appear to have treated him with marked consideration. His letters prove him to have been a favourite among ladies. The Emperor Alexander showed him considerable kindness. He conferred on his brother, Xavier de Maistre, a post in one of the public museums, while to the Sardinian envoy's son he gave a commission in the Russian service.

The first departure of this son for the campaign of 1807 occasioned some of the most charming passages in De Maistre's letters, both to the young soldier himself and to others. For though without a touch of morbid expansiveness, he never denied himself the solace of opening his heart to a trusted friend, and a just reserve with strangers did not hinder a humane and manly confidence with intimates. "This morning," he wrote to his stripling, soon after he had joined the army, "I felt a tightening at my heart when a pet dog came running in and jumped upon your bed, where he finds you no more. He soon perceived his mistake,

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and said clearly enough, after his own fashion: *I am mistaken; where can he be then?* As for me, I have felt all that you will feel, if ever you pursue this mighty trade of being a father." And then he begs of his son, if he should find himself with a tape line in his hand, that he will take his exact measure and forward it. Soon came the news of the battle of Friedland, and the unhappy father thought he read the fate of his son in the face of every acquaintance he met. And so it was in later campaigns, as De Maistre records in correspondence that glows with tender and healthy solicitude. All this is worth dwelling upon, for two reasons if no more. First, because De Maistre has been too much regarded and spoken of as a man of cold sensibility, and little moved by the hardships that fill the destiny of our race. And, again, because his own keen acquaintance with mental anguish helps us to understand the zeal with which he attempts to reconcile the blind cruelty and pain and torture endured by mortals with the benignity and wisdom of the immortal. "After all," he used to say, "there are only two real evils—remorse and disease." It is interesting and suggestive to recall how a later publicist viewed the ills that dwarf our lives. "If I were asked to class human miseries," said Tocqueville, "I would do so in this order: first, Disease; second, Death; third, Doubt." At a later date, he altered the order, and deliberately declared doubt to be the most insupportable of all evils, worse than death itself. But Tocqueville was an aristocrat, as Guizot once told him, who accepted his defeat. He stood on the brink of the torrent of democracy, and shivered. De Maistre was an aristocrat too, but he was incapable of knowing what doubt or hesitation meant. He never dreamt that his cause was lost, and he mocked and defied the Revolution to the end. We easily see how natures of this sort, ardent, impetuous,

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unflinching, find themselves in the triumphant paths that lead to remorse at their close, and how they thus come to feel remorse rather than doubt as the consummate agony of the human mind.

Having had this glimpse of De Maistre's character away from his writings, we need not linger long over the remaining events of his life. In 1814 his wife and two daughters joined him in the Russian capital. Two years later an outburst of religious fanaticism caused the sudden expulsion of the Jesuits from Russia, to De Maistre's infinite mortification. Several conversions had taken place from the Orthodox to the Western faith, and these inflamed the Orthodox party, headed by the Prince de Galitzin, the minister of public worship, with theological fury. De Maistre, whose intense attachment to his own creed was well known, fell under suspicion of having connived at these conversions, and the Emperor himself went so far as to question him. "I told him," De Maistre says, "that I had never changed the faith of any of his subjects, but that if any of them had by chance made me a sharer of their confidence, neither honour nor conscience would have allowed me to tell them that they were wrong." This kind of dialogue between a sovereign and an ambassador implied a situation plainly unfavourable to effective diplomacy. The envoy obtained his recall, and after twenty-five years' absence returned to his native country (1817). On his way home De Maistre passed a few days in Paris, and thus, for the first and last time, one of the most eminent of modern French writers found himself on French soil.

The king accorded De Maistre an honourable reception, conferred upon him a high office and a small sum of money, and lent his ear to other counsellors. The philosopher, though insisting on declaring his political opinions, then, as ever, unwaveringly anti-revolutionary, threw himself

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mainly upon the literary composition that had been his solace in yet more evil days than these. It was at this time that he gave to the world the supreme fruit of nearly half a century of study, meditation, and contact with the world, in *Du Pape, Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg,* and *L'Église gallicane.* Their author did not live long to enjoy the vast discussion they occasioned, nor the reputation they have since conferred upon his name. He died in February 1821 after such a life as we have seen.

III

It is not at all surprising that they upon whom the revolutionary deluge came, should have looked with indiscriminating horror and affright on all the influences which in their view had united first to gather up, and then to release the destructive flood. The eighteenth century to men like De Maistre seemed an infamous parenthesis, mysteriously interposed between the glorious age of Bossuet and Fénelon, and that yet brighter era for faith and the church which was still to come in the good time of Divine Providence. The philosophy of the eighteenth century, he says on more than one occasion, will form one of the most shameful epochs of the human mind: it never praised even good men except for what was bad in them. He looked upon the gods whom that century had worshipped as the direct authors of the bloodshed and ruin in which their epoch had closed. The memory of mild and humane philosophers was covered with the kind of black execration that prophets of old had hurled at Baal or Moloch; Locke and Hume, Voltaire and Rousseau, were habitually spoken of as very scourges of God. From this temper two consequences naturally flowed. In the first place, while it lasted there was no hope of an honest philosophic discussion of the great questions that

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divide speculative minds. Moderation and impartiality were virtues of almost superhuman difficulty for controversialists who had made up their minds that it was their opponents who had erected the guillotine, confiscated the sacred property of the church, slaughtered and banished her children, and filled the land with terror and confusion. It is hard amid the smoking ruins of the homestead to do full justice to the theoretical arguments of the authors of the conflagration. Hence De Maistre, though intimately acquainted with the works of his foes in the letter, was prevented by the vehemence of his antipathy to the effects he attributed to them, from having any just critical estimate of their value and true spirit. "I do not know one of these men," he says of the philosophers of the eighteenth century, "to whom the sacred title of honest man is quite suitable." They are all wanting in probity. Their very names "*me déchirent la bouche.*" To admire Voltaire is the sign of a corrupt soul; and if anybody is drawn to the works of Voltaire, then be sure that God does not love such an one. The divine anathema is written on the very face of this arch-blasphemer; on his shameless brow; in the two extinct craters still sparkling with sensuality and hate; in that frightful *rictus* running from ear to ear; in those lips tightened by cruel malice, like a spring ready to fly back and launch forth blasphemy and sarcasm; he plunges into the mud, rolls in it, drinks of it; he surrenders his imagination to the enthusiasm of hell, which lends him all its forces; Paris crowned him, Sodom would have banished him.[1] Locke, again, did not understand himself. His distinguishing characteristics are feebleness and precipitancy of judgment. Vagueness and irresolution reign in his expressions as they do in his thoughts. He constantly exhibits that most decisive sign of mediocrity—he passes

[1] *Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg* (8th ed., 1862), vol. i. pp. 238-243.

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close by the greatest questions without perceiving them. In the study of philosophy, contempt for Locke is the beginning of knowledge.[1] Condillac was even more vigilantly than anybody else on his guard against his own conscience. But Hume was perhaps the most dangerous and the most guilty of all those mournful writers who will for ever accuse the eighteenth century before posterity—the one who employed the most talent with the most coolness to do most harm.[2] To Bacon De Maistre paid the compliment of composing a long refutation of his main ideas, in which Bacon's blindness, presumption, profanity, and scientific charlatanry are denounced in vehement terms, and treated as the natural outcome of a low morality.

De Maistre believed that his opponents were even worse citizens than they were bad philosophers, and it was his horror of them in the former capacity that made him so bitter and resentful against them in the latter. He could think of no more fitting image for opinions that he did not happen to believe than counterfeit money, "which is struck in the first instance by great criminals, and is afterwards passed on by honest folk who perpetuate the crime without knowing what they do." A philosopher of the highest class, we may be sure, does not permit himself to be drawn down from the true object of his meditations by these sinister emotions. But De Maistre belonged emphatically to minds of the second order, whose eagerness to find truth is never intense and pure enough to raise them above perturbing antipathies to persons. His whole attitude was fatal to his claim to be heard as a truth-seeker. He was not only persuaded of the general justice of the orthodox system, but he refused to believe that it was capable of being

[1] *Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg, 6ième entretien*, i. 397-442.
[2] *Ibid.* (8th ed., 1862) vol. i. p. 403.

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improved or supplemented by anything which a temperate and fair examination of other doctrines might peradventure be found to yield. With De Maistre there was no peradventure. Again, no speculative mind of the highest order ever mistakes, or ever moves systematically apart from, the main current of the social movement of its time. It is implied in the very definition of a thinker of supreme quality that he should detect, and be in a certain accord with, the most forward and central of the ruling tendencies of his epoch. The years that have elapsed since De Maistre was driven to attempt to explain the world to himself, have sufficed to show that the central conditions at that time for the permanent reorganisation of the society that had just been so violently rent in pieces, were assuredly not theological, military, nor ultramontane, but the opposite of all these.

There was a second consequence of the conditions of the time. The catastrophe of Europe affected the matter as well as the manner of contemporary speculation. The French Revolution has become to us no more than a term in a historic series. To some of the best of those who were confronted on every side by its tumult and agitation, it was the prevailing of the gates of hell, the moral disruption of the universe, the absolute and total surrender of the world to them that plough iniquity and sow wickedness. Even under ordinary circumstances few men have gone through life without encountering some triumphant iniquity, some gross and prolonged cruelty, which makes them wonder how heaven should allow such things to be. If we remember the aspect which the Revolution wore in the eyes of those who, seeing it, yet did not understand, we can imagine what dimensions this eternal enigma must have assumed in their sight. It was inevitable that the first problem to press on men with resistless urgency should

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be the ancient question of the method of the Creator's temporal government. What is the law of the distribution of good and evil fortune? How can we vindicate with regard to the conditions of this life, the different destinies that fall to men? How can we defend the moral ordering of a world in which the wicked and godless constantly triumph, while the virtuous and upright who retain their integrity, are as frequently buffeted and put to shame?

This tremendous question has never been presented with such sublimity of expression, such noble simplicity and force of thought, as in the majestic and touching legend of Job. But its completeness, as a presentation of the human tragedy, is impaired by the excessive prosperity that is finally supposed to reward the patient here for his fortitude. Job received twice as much as he had before, and his latter end was blessed more than his beginning. In the chronicles of actual history men fare not so. There is a terribly logical finish about some of the dealings of fate, and in life the working of a curse is seldom stayed by any dramatic necessity for a smooth consummation. Destiny is no artist. The facts that confront us are relentless. No statement of the case is adequate which maintains, by ever so delicate an implication, that in the long run somehow it is well in temporal things with the just, and ill with the unjust. Until we have firmly looked in the face the grim truth that temporal rewards and punishments do not follow the possession or the want of spiritual or moral virtue, so long we are still ignorant what that enigma is, which speculative men, from the author of the book of Job downwards, have striven to resolve. We can readily imagine the fulness with which the question would grow up in the mind of a royalist and Catholic exile at the end of the eighteenth century.

Nothing can be more clearly put than De

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Maistre's answers to the question that the circumstances of the time placed before him. What is the law of the distribution of good and evil fortune in this life? Is it a moral law? Do prosperity and adversity fall respectively to the just and the unjust, either individually or collectively? Has the ancient covenant been faithfully kept, that whoso hearkens diligently to the divine voice, and observes all the commandments to do them, shall be blessed in his basket and his store and in all the work of his hand? Or is God a God that hideth himself?

De Maistre perceived that the optimistic conception of the Deity as benign, merciful, infinitely forgiving, was far from covering the facts. So he insisted on seeing in human destiny the ever-present hand of a stern and terrible judge, administering a Draconian code with blind severity. God created men under conditions that left them free to choose between good and evil. All the physical evil that exists in the world is a penalty for the moral evil that has resulted from the abuse by men of this freedom of choice. For these physical calamities the Deity is only responsible in the way in which a criminal judge is responsible for a hanging. Men cannot blame the judge for the gallows; the fault is their own in committing those offences for which hanging is prescribed beforehand as the penalty. These curses that dominate human life are not the result of the cruelty of the divine ruler, but of the folly and wickedness of mankind, who, seeing the better course, yet deliberately choose the worse. The order of the world is overthrown by the iniquities of men; it is we who have provoked the exercise of the divine justice, and called down the tokens of his vengeance. The misery and disaster that surround us like a cloak are the penalty of our crimes and the price of our expiation. As the divine St. Thomas has said: *Deus est auctor mali*

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quod est poena, non autem mali quod est culpa. There is a certain quantity of wrong done over the face of the world; therefore the great Judge exacts a proportionate quantity of punishment. The total amount of evil suffered makes nice equation with the total amount of evil done; the extent of human suffering tallies precisely with the extent of human guilt. Of course you must take original sin into account, "which explains all, and without which you can explain nothing." "In virtue of this primitive degradation we are subject to all sorts of physical sufferings *in general*; just as in virtue of this same degradation we are subject to all sorts of vices *in general.* This original malady therefore [which is the correlative of original sin] has no other name. It is only the capacity of suffering all evils, as original sin is only the capacity of committing all crimes." [1] Hence all calamity is either the punishment of sins actually committed by the sufferers, or else it is the general penalty exacted for general sinfulness. Sometimes an innocent being is stricken, and a guilty being appears to escape. But is it not the same in the transactions of earthly tribunals? And yet we do not say that they are conducted without regard to justice and righteousness. "When God punishes any society for the crimes that it has committed, he does justice as we do justice to ourselves in these sorts of circumstance. A city revolts; it massacres the representatives of the sovereign; it shuts its gates against him; it defends itself against his arms; it is taken. The prince has it dismantled and deprived of all its privileges; nobody will find fault with this decision on the ground that there are innocent persons shut up in the city." [2]

[1] *Soirées*, i. 76.

[2] De Maistre found a curiously characteristic kind of support for this view in the fact that evils are called *fléaux*: flails are things to beat with: so evils must be things with which men are beaten; and as we should not

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De Maistre's deity is thus a colossal Septembriseur, enthroned high in the peaceful heavens, demanding ever-renewed holocausts in the name of the public safety.

It is true, as a general rule, that the objects that men have worshipped have improved in morality and wisdom as men themselves have improved. The quiet gods, without effort of their own, have grown holier and purer by the agitations and toil which civilise their worshippers. In other words, the same influences that elevate and widen our sense of human duty give corresponding height and nobleness to our ideas of the divine character. The history of the civilisation of the earth is the history of the civilisation of Olympus also. It will be seen that the deity whom De Maistre sets up is below the moral level of the time in respect of Punishment. In intellectual matters he vehemently proclaimed the superiority of the tenth or the twelfth over the eighteenth century, but it is surely carrying admiration for those loyal times indecently far, to seek in the vindictive sackings of revolted towns, and the miscellaneous butcheries of men, women, and babes, which then marked the vengeance of outraged sovereignty, the most apt parallel and analogy for the systematic administration of human society by its Creator. Such punishment can no longer be regarded as moral in any deep or permanent sense; it implies a gross, harsh, and revengeful character in the executioner, that is eminently perplexing and

be beaten if we did not deserve it, *argal*, suffering is a merited punishment. Apart from that common infirmity which leads people, after they have discovered an analogy between two things, to argue from the properties of the one to those of the other, as if, instead of being analogous, they were identical, De Maistre was particularly fond of inferring moral truths from etymologies. He has an argument for the deterioration of man, drawn from the fact that the Romans expressed in the same word, *supplicium*, the two ideas of prayer and punishment (*Soirées, 2ième entretien*, 1. p. 108). His profundity as an etymologist may be gathered from his analysis of *cadaver*: *ca*-ro, *da*-ta, *ver*-mibus. There are many others of the same quality.

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incredible to those who expect to find an idea of justice in the government of the world, at least not materially below what is attained in the clumsy efforts of uninspired publicists.

In mere point of administration, the criminal code that De Maistre put into the hands of the Supreme Being works in a more arbitrary and capricious manner than any device of an Italian Bourbon. As Voltaire asks—

> *Lisbonne, qui n'est plus, eut-elle plus de vices*
> *Que Londres, que Paris, plongés dans les délices?*
> *Lisbonne est abîmée, et l'on danse à Paris.*

Stay, De Maistre replies, look at Paris thirty years later, not dancing, but red with blood. This kind of thing is often said, even now; but it is time to abandon the prostitution of the name of Justice to a process which brings Louis XVI. to the block, and consigns De Maistre to poverty and exile, because Louis XIV., the Regent, and Louis XV. had been profligate men or injudicious rulers. The reader may remember how the unhappy Emperor Maurice, as his five innocent sons were in turn murdered before his eyes, at each stroke piously ejaculated: "Thou art just, O Lord! and thy judgments are righteous."[1] Any name would befit this kind of transaction better than that which, in the dealings of men with one another, we reserve for the honourable anxiety that he should reap who has sown, that the reward should be to him who has toiled for it, and the pain to him who has deliberately incurred it. What is gained by attributing to the divine government a method tainted with every quality that could vitiate the enactment of penalties by a temporal sovereign?

We need not labour this part of the discussion. Though conducted with much brilliance and vigour by De Maistre, it is not his most important

[1] Gibbon, c. xlvi. vol. v. p. 385.

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or remarkable contribution to thought. Before passing on to that, it is worth while to make one remark. It will be inferred from De Maistre's general position that he was no friend to physical science. Just as moderns see in the advance of the methods and boundaries of physical knowledge the most direct and sure means of displacing the unfruitful subjective methods of old, and so of renovating the entire field of human thought and activity, so did De Maistre see, as his school has seen since, that here was the stronghold of his foes. "Ah, how dearly," he exclaimed, "has man paid for the natural sciences!" Not but that Providence designed that man should know something about them; only it must be in due order. The ancients were not permitted to attain to much, or even any, sound knowledge of physics, indisputably above us as they were in force of mind, a fact shown by the superiority of their languages which ought to silence for ever the voice of our modern pride. Why did the ancients remain so ignorant of natural science? Because they were not Christian. "When all Europe was Christian, when the priests were the universal teachers, when all the establishments of Europe were Christianised, when theology had taken its place at the head of all instruction, and the other faculties were ranged around her like maids of honour round their queen, the human race being thus prepared, then the natural sciences were given to it." Science must be kept in its place, for it resembles fire which, when confined in the grates prepared for it, is the most useful and powerful of man's servants; scattered about anyhow, it is the most terrible of scourges. Whence the marked supremacy of the seventeenth century, especially in France? From the happy accord of religion, science, and chivalry, and from the supremacy conceded to the first. The more perfect

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theology is in a country, the more fruitful it is in true science; and that is why Christian nations have surpassed all others in the sciences, and that is why the Indians and Chinese will never reach us, so long as we remain respectively as we are. The more theology is cultivated, honoured, and supreme, then, other things being equal, the more perfect will human science be: that is to say, it will have the greater force and expansion, and will be the more free from every mischievous and perilous connection.[1]

Little would be gained here by serious criticism of a view of this kind from a positive point. How little, the reader will understand from De Maistre's own explanations of his principles of Proof and Evidence. "They have called to witness against Moses," he says, "history, chronology, astronomy, geology. The objections have disappeared before true science; but those were profoundly wise who despised them before any inquiry, or who only examined them in order to discover a refutation, but without ever doubting that there was one. Even a mathematical objection ought to be despised, for though it may be a demonstrated truth, still you will never be able to demonstrate that it contradicts a truth that has been demonstrated before." His final formula he boldly announced in these words: "*Que toutes les fois qu'une proposition sera prouvée par le genre de preuve qui lui appartient, l'objection quelconque,* MÊME INSOLUBLE, *ne doit plus être écoutée.*" Suppose, for example, that by a consensus of testimony it were perfectly proved that Archimedes set fire to the fleet of Marcellus by a burning-glass; then all the objections of geometry disappear. Prove if you can, and if you choose, that by certain laws a glass, in order to be capable of setting fire to the Roman fleet, must have been as big

[1] See the *Examen de la philosophie de Bacon*, vol. ii. pp. 58 *et seq.*

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as the whole city of Syracuse, and ask me what answer I have to make to that. "*J'ai à vous répondre qu'Archimède brûla la flotte romaine avec un miroir ardent.*"

The interesting thing about such opinions as these is not the exact height and depth of their falseness, but the considerations which could recommend them to a man of so much knowledge, both of books and of the outer facts of life, and of so much natural acuteness as De Maistre. Persons who have accustomed themselves to ascertained methods of proof, are apt to look on a man who vows that if a thing has been declared true by some authority whom he respects, then that constitutes proof to him, either as the victim of a preposterous and barely credible infatuation, or else as a flat impostor. Yet De Maistre was no ignorant monk. He had no selfish or official interest in taking away the keys of knowledge. The true reasons for his detestation of the eighteenth-century philosophers, science, and literature, are simple enough. Like every wise man, he felt that the end of all philosophy and science is emphatically social, the construction and maintenance and improvement of a fabric under which the communities of men may find shelter, and may secure all the conditions for living their lives with dignity and service. Then he held that no truth can be harmful to society. If he found any system of opinions, any given attitude of the mind, injurious to tranquillity and the public order, he instantly concluded that, however plausible they might seem when tested by logic and demonstration, they were fundamentally untrue and deceptive. What is logic, compared with eternal salvation in the next world, and the practice of virtue in this? The recommendation of such a mind as De Maistre's is the intensity of its appreciation of order and social happiness. The

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obvious weakness of such a mind, and the curse inherent in its influence, is that it overlooks the prime condition of all; that social order can never be established on a durable basis so long as the discoveries of scientific truth in all its departments are suppressed, or incorrectly appreciated, or socially misapplied. De Maistre did not perceive that the cause which he supported was no longer the cause of peace and tranquillity and right living, but was in a state of absolute decomposition, and therefore was the cause of disorder and blind wrong living. Of this we shall now see more.

IV

When the waters of the deluge of 1789 began to abate, the best minds soon satisfied themselves that the event which Bonaparte's restoration of order enabled them to look back upon with a certain tranquillity had been neither more nor less than a new irruption of barbarians into the European world. The monarchy, the nobles, and the church, with all the ideas that gave each of them life and power, had fallen before atheists and Jacobins, as the ancient empire of Rome had fallen before Huns and Goths, Vandals and Lombards. The leaders of the Revolution had succeeded one another, as Attila had come after Alaric, and Genseric had been followed by Odoacer. The problem that presented itself was not new in the history of western civilisation; the same dissolution of old bonds that perplexed the foremost men at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had distracted their predecessors from the fifth to the eighth, though their conditions and circumstances were widely different. The practical question in both cases was the same—how to establish a stable social order which, resting on principles that should command the assent of all,

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might secure the co-operation of all for its harmonious and efficient maintenance, and might offer a firm basis for the highest and best life that the moral and intellectual state of the time allowed. Two courses were open, or seemed to be open, in this gigantic enterprise of reconstructing a society. One of them was to treat the case of the eighteenth century as if it were not merely similar to, but exactly identical with, the case of the fifth, and as if exactly the same forces that had knit western Europe together into a compact civilisation a thousand years before, would again suffice for a second consolidation. Christianity, rising with the zeal and strength of youth out of the ruins of the Empire, and feudalism by the need of self-preservation imposing a form upon the unshapen associations of the barbarians, had between them compacted the foundations and reared the fabric of mediaeval life. Why, many men asked themselves, should not Christian and feudal ideas repeat their glorious achievement, and be the means of reorganising the system which a blind rebellion against them had thrown into deplorable and fatal confusion? Let the century that had come to such an end be regarded as a mysteriously intercalated episode, and no more, in the long drama of faith and sovereign order. Let it pass as a sombre and pestilent stream, whose fountains no man should discover, whose waters had for a season mingled with the mightier current of the divinely allotted destiny of the race, and had then gathered themselves apart and flowed off, to end as they had begun, in the stagnation and barrenness of the desert. Philosophers and men of letters, astronomers and chemists, atheists and republicans, had shown that they were only powerful to destroy, as Goths and Vandals had been. They had shown that they were impotent, as Goths and Vandals had been, in building up

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again. Let men turn their faces, then, once more to that system by which in the ancient times Europe had been delivered from a relapse into eternal night.

The second course was very different from this. The minds to whom it commended itself were cast in a different mould, and drew their inspiration from other traditions. In their view the system which the church had been the main agency in organising, had fallen quite as much from its own irremediable weakness as from the direct onslaughts of assailants within and without. The barbarians had rushed in, it was true, in 1793; but this time it was the church and feudalism that were in the position of the old empire on whose ruins they had built. What had once restored order and belief to the West, was now in its own turn overtaken by decay and dissolution. To look to them to unite these new barbarians in a stable and vigorous civilisation, because they had organised Europe of old, was as infatuated as it would have been to expect the later emperors to equal the exploits of the Republic and their greatest predecessors in the purple. To despise philosophers and men of science was only to play over again in a new dress the very part which Julian had enacted in the face of nascent Christianity. The eighteenth century, instead of being the home of malaria that the Catholic and Royalist party represented, was in truth the seed-ground of a new and better future. Its ideas were to furnish the material and the implements by which should be repaired the breaches and chasms in European order that had been made alike by despots and Jacobins, by priests and atheists, by aristocrats and sans-culottes. Amidst all the demolition upon which its leading minds had been so zealously bent, they had been animated by the warmest love of social justice, of human freedom, of equal

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rights, and by the most fervent and sincere longing to make a nobler happiness more universally attainable by all the children of men. It was to these great principles that we ought eagerly to turn, to liberty, to equality, to brotherhood, if we wished to achieve before the new invaders a work of civilisation and social reconstruction, such as Catholicism and feudalism had achieved for the multitudinous invaders of old.

Such was the difference that divided opinion when men took heart to survey the appalling scene of moral desolation that the cataclysm of 1793 had left behind. We may admire the courage of either school. For if the conscience of the Liberals was oppressed by the sanguinary tragedy in which freedom, brotherhood, justice had been consummated, the Catholic and the Royalist were just as sorely burdened with the weight of kingly baseness and priestly hypocrisies. If the one had some difficulty in interpreting Jacobinism and the Terror, the other was still more severely pressed to interpret the fact, the origin, the meaning of the Revolution; if the Liberal had Marat and Hébert, the Royalist had Louis XV., and the Catholic had Dubois and De Rohan. Each school could intrepidly hurl back the taunts of its enemy, and neither of them did full justice to the strong side of the other. Yet we who are, in England at all events, removed a little aside from the centre of this dire battle, may perceive that at that time both of the contending hosts fought under honourable banners, and could inscribe upon their shields an intelligible device. Indeed, unless the modern Liberal admits the strength inherent in the cause of his enemies, it is impossible for him to explain to himself the duration and obstinacy of the conflict, the slow advance and occasional repulse of the host in which he has enlisted, and the tardy progress that Liberalism has made in the stupendous reconstruction which the Revolution has forced the

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modern political thinker to meditate upon, and the modern statesman to extend and control.

De Maistre, from those general ideas as to the method of the government of the world, of which we have already seen something, had formed what he conceived to be a perfectly satisfactory way of accounting for the eighteenth century and its terrific climax. The will of man is left free; he acts contrary to the will of God; and then God exacts the shedding of blood as the penalty. So much for the past. The only hope of the future lay in an immediate return to the system that God himself had established, and in the restoration of the spiritual power that had presided over the reconstruction of Europe in darker and more chaotic times than even these. Though, perhaps, he nowhere expresses himself on this point in a distinct formula, De Maistre was firmly impressed with the idea of historic unity and continuity. He looked upon the history of the West in its integrity, and was entirely free from anything like the disastrous kind of misconception that makes the English Protestant treat the long period between St. Paul and Martin Luther as a howling waste, or that makes some Americans omit from all account the still longer period of human effort from the crucifixion of Christ to the Declaration of Independence. The rise of the vast structure of western civilisation during and after the dissolution of the Empire, presented itself to his mind as a single and uniform process, though marked in portions by temporary, casual, parenthetical interruptions, due to depraved will and disordered pride. All the dangers to which this civilisation had been exposed in its infancy and growth were before his eyes. First, there were the heresies with which the subtle and debased ingenuity of the Greeks had stained and distorted the great but simple mysteries of the faith. Then came the hordes of invaders from the North, sweeping with irresistible

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force over regions that the weakness or cowardice of the wearers of the purple left defenceless before them. Before the northern tribes had settled in their possessions, and had full time to assimilate the faith and the institutions which they found there, the growing organisation was menaced by a more deadly peril in the incessant and steady advance of the bloody and fanatical tribes from the East. And in this way De Maistre's mind continued the picture down to the latest days of all, when men had arisen who, denying God and mocking at Christ, were bent on the destruction of the very foundations of society, and had nothing better to offer the human race than a miserable return to a state of nature.

As he thus reproduced this long drama, one benign and central figure was ever present, changeless in the midst of ceaseless change; laboriously building up with preterhuman patience and preterhuman sagacity, when other powers, one after another in evil succession, were madly raging to destroy and to pull down; thinking only of the great interests of order and civilisation, of which it had been constituted the eternal protector, and showing its divine origin and inspiration alike by its unfailing wisdom and its unfailing benevolence. It is the Sovereign Pontiff who thus stands forth throughout the history of Europe, as the great Demiurgus of universal civilisation. If the Pope had filled only such a position as the Patriarch held at Constantinople, or if there had been no Pope and Christianity had depended exclusively on the East for its propagation, with no great spiritual organ in the West, what would have become of western development? It was the energy and resolution of the Pontiffs that resisted the heresies of the East, and preserved to the Christian religion that plainness and intelligibility, without which it would never have made a way to the rude understanding

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and simple hearts of the barbarians from the North. It was their wise patriotism that protected Italy against Greek oppression, and by acting the part of mayors of the palace to the decrepit Eastern emperors, it was they who contrived to preserve the independence and maintain the fabric of society until the appearance of the Carlovingians, in whom, with the rapid instinct of true statesmen, they at once recognised the founders of a new Empire of the West. If the Popes, again, had possessed over the Eastern Empire the same authority they had over the Western, they would have repulsed not only the Saracens, but the Turks too, and none of the evils which these nations have inflicted on us would ever have taken place.[1] Even as it was, when the Saracens threatened the West, the Popes were the chief agents in organising resistance, and giving spirit and animation to the defenders of Europe. Their alert vision saw that to crush for ever that formidable enemy, it was not enough to defend ourselves against his assaults; we must attack him at home. The Crusades, vulgarly treated as the wars of a blind and superstitious piety, were in truth wars of high policy. From the Council of Clermont down to the famous day of Lepanto, the hand and spirit of the Pontiff were to be traced in every part of the tremendous struggle that prevented Europe from being handed over to the tyranny, ignorance, and barbarism that have always been the inevitable fruits of Mahometan conquest, and had already stamped out civilisation in Asia Minor and Palestine and Greece, once the very garden of the universe.

This admirable and politic heroism of the Popes in the face of foes pressing from without, De Maistre

[1] De Maistre forgot or underestimated the services of Leo the Isaurian whose repulse of the Caliph's forces at Constantinople (A.D. 717) was perhaps as important for Europe as the more renowned victory of Charles Martel. But then Leo was an Iconoclast and heretic. Cf. Finlay's *Byzantine Empire*, pp. 22, 23.

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found more than equalled by their wisdom, courage, and activity in organising and developing the elements of a civilised system within. The maxim of old societies had been that which Lucan puts into the mouth of Caesar—*humanum paucis vivit genus*. A vast population of slaves had been one of the inevitable social conditions of the period: the Popes never rested from their endeavours to banish servitude from among Christian nations. Women in old societies had filled a mean and degraded place: it was reserved for the new spiritual power to rescue the race from that vicious circle in which men had debased the nature of women, and women had given back all the weakness and perversity they had received from men, and to perceive that "the most effectual way of perfecting the man is to ennoble and exalt the woman."

The organisation of the priesthood, again, was a masterpiece of practical wisdom. Such an order, removed from the fierce or selfish interests of ordinary life by the holy regulation of celibacy, and by the austere discipline of the church, was indispensable in the midst of such a society as that which it was the function of the church to guide. Who but the members of an order thus set apart, acting in strict subordination to the central power, and so presenting a front of unbroken spiritual unity, could have held their way among tumultuous tribes, half-barbarous nobles, and proud and unruly kings, protesting against wrong, passionately inculcating new and higher ideas of right, denouncing the darkness of the false gods, calling on all men to worship the cross and adore the mysteries of the true God? Compare now the impotency of the Protestant missionary, squatting in gross comfort with wife and babes among the savages he has come to convert, preaching a disputatious doctrine, wrangling openly with the rival sent by some other sect—compare this impotency with the success that

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follows the devoted sons of the church, impressing their proselytes with the mysterious virtue of their continence, the self-denial of their lives, the unity of their dogma and their rites; and then recognise the wisdom of these great churchmen who created a priesthood after this manner in the days when every priest was as the missionary is now.

Finally, it was the occupants of the holy chair who prepared, softened, one might almost say sweetened, the occupants of thrones; it was to them that Providence had confided the education of the sovereigns of Europe. The Popes brought up the youth of the European monarchy; they made it precisely in the same way in which Fénelon made the Duke of Burgundy. In each case the task consisted in eradicating from a fine character an element of ferocity that would have ruined all. "Everything that constrains a man strengthens him. He cannot obey without perfecting himself; and by the mere fact of overcoming himself he is better. Any man will vanquish the most violent passion at thirty, because at five or six you have taught him of his own will to give up a plaything or a sweetmeat. That came to pass to the monarchy, which happens to an individual who has been well brought up. The continued efforts of the church, directed by the Sovereign Pontiff, did what had never been seen before, and what will never be seen again, where that authority is not recognised. Insensibly, without threats or laws or battles, without violence and without resistance, the great European charter was proclaimed, not on paper nor by the voice of public criers; but in all European hearts, then all Catholic. Kings surrender the power of judging by themselves, and nations in return declare kings infallible and inviolable. Such is the fundamental law of the European monarchy, and it is the work of the Popes."[1]

[1] *Du Pape*, bk. iii. ch. iv. p. 298 (ed. 1866).

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All this, however, is only the external development of De Maistre's central idea, the historical corroboration of a truth to which he conducts us in the first instance by general considerations. Assuming, what it is less and less characteristic of the present century at any rate to deny, that Christianity was the only actual force by which the regeneration of Europe could be effected after the decline of the Roman civilisation, he insists that, as he again and again expresses it, "without the Pope there is no veritable Christianity." In saying that without the Pope there is no true Christianity, what he considered himself as having established was, that unless there be some supreme and independent possessor of authority to settle doctrine, to regulate discipline, to give authentic counsel, to apply accepted principles to disputed cases, then there can be no such thing as a religious system which shall have power to bind the members of a vast and not homogeneous body in the salutary bonds of a common civilisation, or to guide and inform an universal conscience. In each individual state everybody admits the absolute necessity of having some sovereign power that shall make, declare, and administer the laws, and from whose action in any one of these aspects there shall be no appeal; a power that shall be strong enough to protect the rights and enforce the duties it has authoritatively proclaimed and enjoined. In free England, as in despotic Turkey, the privileges and obligations that the law tolerates or imposes, and all the benefits their existence confers on the community, are the creatures and conditions of a supreme authority from which there is no appeal, whether the instrument by which this authority makes its will known be an act of parliament or a ukase. This conception of temporal sovereignty, especially familiarised to a later generation by the teaching of Austin, was carried by De Maistre into discussions

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upon the limits of the Papal power with great ingenuity and force, and, if we accept the premisses, with great success.

It should be said here, that throughout his book on the Pope, De Maistre talks of Christianity exclusively as a statesman or a publicist would talk about it; not theologically nor spiritually, but politically and socially. The question with which he concerns himself is the utilisation of Christianity as a force to shape and organise a system of civilised societies; a study of the conditions under which this utilisation had taken place in the earlier centuries of the era; and a deduction from them of the conditions under which we might ensure a repetition of the process in changed modern circumstance. In the eighteenth century men were accustomed to ask of Christianity, as Protestants always ask of so much of Catholicism as they have dropped, whether or no it is true. But after the Revolution the question changed, and became an inquiry whether and how Christianity could contribute to the reconstruction of society. People asked less how true it was, than how strong it was; less how many unquestioned dogmas, than how much social weight it had, or could develop; less as to the precise amount and form of belief that would save a soul, than as to the way in which it might be expected to assist the European community.

It was the strength of this temper in him that led to his extraordinary detestation of and contempt for the Greeks. Their turn for pure speculation excited all his anger. In a curious chapter, he exhausts invective in denouncing them.[1] The sarcasm of Sallust delights him, that the actions of Greece were very fine, *verum aliquanto minores quam fama feruntur*. Their military glory was only a flash of about a hundred and fourteen years

[1] *Du Pape*, bk. iv. ch. vii.

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from Marathon; compare this with the prolonged splendour of Rome, France, and England. In philosophy they displayed decent talent, but even here their true merit is to have brought the wisdom of Asia into Europe, for they invented nothing. Greece was the home of syllogism and of unreason. "Read Plato: at every page you will draw a striking distinction. As often as he is Greek, he wearies you. He is only great, sublime, penetrating, when he is a theologian; in other words, when he is announcing positive and everlasting dogmas, free from all quibble, and which are so clearly marked with the eastern cast, that not to perceive it one must never have had a glimpse of Asia. . . . There was in him a sophist and a theologian, or, if you choose, a Greek and a Chaldean." The Athenians could never pardon one of their great leaders, all of whom fell victims in one shape or another to a temper frivolous as that of a child, ferocious as that of men,—"*espèce de moutons enragés, toujours menés par la nature, et toujours par nature dévorant leurs bergers.*" As for their oratory, "the tribune of Athens would have been the disgrace of mankind if Phocion and men like him, by occasionally ascending it before drinking the hemlock, or setting out for their place of exile, had not in some sort balanced such a mass of loquacity, extravagance, and cruelty."[1]

[1] A remark of Finlay's is worth quoting here. "The Greeks," he says, "had at times only a secondary share in the ecclesiastical controversies in the Eastern Church, though the circumstance of these controversies having been carried on in the Greek language has made the natives of Western Europe attribute them to a philosophic, speculative, and polemic spirit, inherent in the Hellenic mind. A very slight examination of history is sufficient to prove that several of the heresies which disturbed the Eastern Church had their origin in the more profound religious ideas of the oriental nations, and that many of the opinions called heretical were in a great measure expressions of the mental nationality of the Syrians, Armenians, Egyptians, and Persians, and had no conception whatever with the Greek mind."—*Byzantine Empire, from* 716 *to* 1057, p. 262.

The same writer (p. 268) remarks that "the religious or theological portion of Popery, as a section of the Christian Church, is really Greek; and it is only the ecclesiastical, political, and theoretic peculiarities of the fabric which can be considered as the work of the Latin Church.

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It is very important to remember this constant solicitude for ideas that should work well, in connection with the book of De Maistre's that has had most influence in Europe, by supplying a base for the theories of ultramontanism. Unless we perceive very clearly that throughout his ardent speculation on the Papal power his mind was bent upon enforcing the practical solution of a pressing social problem, we easily misunderstand him and underrate what he had to say. A charge has been forcibly urged against him by an eminent English critic, for example, that he has confounded supremacy with infallibility, than which, as the writer truly says, no two ideas can be more perfectly distinct, one being superiority of force, and the other incapacity of error.[1] De Maistre made logical blunders in abundance quite as bad as this, but he was too acute, I think, deliberately to erect so elaborate a structure upon a confusion so obvious, that must have stared him in the face from the first page of his work to the last. If we look upon his book as a mere general defence of the Papacy, designed to explore and fortify all its pretensions one by one, we should have great right to complain against having two claims so essentially divergent, treated as though they were the same thing, or could be held in their places by the same supports. But let us regard the treatise on the Pope not as meant to convince freethinkers or Protestants that divine grace inspires every decree of the Holy Father, though that would have been the right view of it if it had been written fifty years earlier. It was composed within the first twenty years of the nineteenth century, when the universe, to men of De Maistre's stamp, seemed once more without form and void. His object, as he tells us more than once, was to find a way of restoring a religion and a morality in Europe; of giving to truth the forces

[1] Sir J. Fitzjames Stephen in the *Saturday Review*, Sept. 9, 1865, p. 334.

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demanded for the conquests she was meditating; of strengthening the thrones of sovereigns, and of gently calming that general fermentation of spirit threatening mightier evils than any that had yet overwhelmed society. From this point of view we shall see that the distinction between supremacy and infallibility was not worth recognising.

Practically, he says, "infallibility is only a consequence of supremacy, or rather it is absolutely the same thing under two different names. . . . In effect it is the same thing, *in practice*, not to be subject to error, and not to be liable to be accused of it. Thus, even if we should agree that no divine promise was made to the Pope, he would not be less infallible or deemed so, as the final tribunal; for every judgment from which you cannot appeal is and must be (*est et doit être*) held for just in every human association, under any imaginable form of government; and every true statesman will understand me perfectly, when I say that the point is to ascertain not only if the Sovereign Pontiff is, but if he must be, infallible."[1] In another place he says distinctly enough that the infallibility of the church has two aspects; in one of them it is the object of divine promise, in the other it is a human implication, and that in the latter aspect infallibility is supposed in the church, just "as we are absolutely bound to suppose it, even in temporal sovereignties (where it does not really exist), under pain of seeing society dissolved." The church only demands what other sovereignties demand, though she has the immense superiority over them of having her claim backed by direct promise from heaven.[2] Take away the dogma, if you will, he says, and only consider the thing politically, which is exactly what he really does all through the book. The Pope, from this point of view, asks for no other infallibility than that which is attributed to all

[1] *Du Pape*, bk. i. ch. i. p. 17. [2] *Ibid.* bk. i. ch. xix. pp. 124, 125.

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sovereigns.[1] Without either vindicating or surrendering the supernatural side of the Papal claim, he only insists upon the political, social, or human side of it, as an inseparable quality of an admitted supremacy.[2] In short, from beginning to end of this speculation, from which the best kind of ultramontanism has drawn its defence, he evinces a deprecatory anxiety—a rare humour with De Maistre—not to fight on the issue of the dogma of infallibility over which Protestants and unbelievers have won an infinite number of cheap victories; that he leaves as a theme more fitted for the disputations of theologians. My position, he seems to keep saying, is that if the Pope is spiritually supreme, then he is virtually and practically *as if he were* infallible, just in the same sense in which the English Parliament and monarch, and the Russian Czar, are as if they were infallible. But let us not argue so much about this, which is only secondary. The main question is whether without the Pope there can be a true Christianity, "that is to say, a Christianity, active, powerful, converting, regenerating, conquering, perfecting."

De Maistre was probably conducted to his theory by an analogy, which he tacitly leaned upon more strongly than it could well bear, between temporal organisation and spiritual organisation. In inchoate communities, the momentary self-interest and the promptly stirred passions of men would rend the growing society in pieces, unless they were restrained

[1] *Du Pape*, bk. i. ch. xvi. p. 111.

[2] "*Il n'y a point de souveraineté qui pour le bonheur des hommes, et pour le sien surtout, ne soit bornée de quelque manière, mais dans l'intérieur de ces bornes, placées comme il plaît à Dieu, elle est toujours et partout absolue et tenue pour infaillible. Et quand je parle de l'exercice légitime de la souveraineté, je n'entends point ou je ne dis point l'exercice* juste, *ce qui produirait une amphibologie dangereuse, à moins que par ce dernier mot on ne veuille dire que tout ce qu'elle opine dans son cercle est* juste ou tenu pour tel, *ce qui est la vérité. C'est ainsi qu'un tribunal suprême, tant qu'il ne sort pas de ses attributions, est toujours juste;* car c'est la même chose DANS LA PRATIQUE, d'être infaillible, ou de se tromper sans appel."—*Ibid.* bk. ii. ch. xi. p. 212 (footnote).

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by the strong hand of law in some shape or other, written or unwritten, and administered by an authority, either physically too strong to be resisted, or else set up by the common consent seeking to further the general convenience. To divide this authority, so that none should know where to look for a sovereign decree, nor be able to ascertain the commands of sovereign law; to embody it in the persons of many discordant expounders, each assuming oracular weight and equal sanction; to leave individuals to administer and interpret it for themselves, and to decide among themselves its application to their own cases; what would this be but a deliberate preparation for anarchy and dissolution? For it is one of the clear conditions of the efficacy of the social union, that every member of it should be able to know for certain the terms on which he belongs to it, the compliances which it will insist upon in him, and the compliances which it will in turn permit him to insist upon in others, and therefore it is indispensable that there should be some definite and admitted centre where this very essential knowledge should be accessible.

Some such reflections as these must have been at the bottom of De Maistre's defiant apology for the Papal supremacy, or at any rate they may serve to bring before our minds with greater clearness the kind of foundations on which his scheme rested. For law substitute Christianity, for social union spiritual union, for legal obligations the obligations of the faith. Instead of individuals bound together by allegiance to common political institutions, conceive communities united in the bonds of religious brotherhood into a sort of universal republic, under the moderate supremacy of a supreme spiritual power. As a matter of fact, it was the intervention of this spiritual power that restrained the anarchy, internal and external, of the ferocious and imper-

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fectly organised sovereignties figuring in the early history of modern Europe. And as a matter of theory, what could be more rational and defensible than such an intervention made systematic, with its rightfulness and disinterestedness universally recognised? Grant Christianity as the spiritual basis of the life and action of modern communities; supporting both the organised structure of each of them, and the interdependent system composed of them all; accepted by the individual members of each, and by the integral bodies forming the whole. But who shall declare what the Christian doctrine is, and how its maxims bear upon special cases, and what oracles they announce in particular sets of circumstance? Amid the turbulence of popular passion, in face of the crushing despotism of an insensate tyrant, between the furious hatred of jealous nations or the violent ambition of rival sovereigns, what likelihood would there be of either party to the contention yielding tranquilly and promptly to any presentation of Christian teaching made by the other, or by some suspected neutral as a decisive authority between them? Obviously there must be some supreme and indisputable interpreter, before whose final decree the tyrant should quail, the flood of popular lawlessness flow back within its accustomed banks, and contending sovereigns or jealous nations fraternally embrace. Again, in those questions of faith and discipline which the ill-exercised ingenuity of men is for ever raising and pressing upon the attention of Christendom, it is just as obvious that there must be some tribunal to pronounce an authoritative judgment. Otherwise, each nation is torn into sects; and amid the throng of sects where is unity? "To maintain that a crowd of independent churches form a church, one and universal, is to maintain in other terms that all the political governments of Europe only form a single government, one

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and universal." There could no more be a kingdom of France without a king, nor an empire of Russia without an emperor, than there could be one universal church without an acknowledged head. That this head must be the successor of St. Peter, is declared alike by the voice of tradition, the explicit testimony of the early writers, the repeated utterances of later theologians of all schools, and that general sentiment which presses itself upon every conscientious reader of religious history.

The argument, he contends, that the voice of the church is to be sought in general councils, is absurd. To maintain that a council has any other function than to assure and certify the Pope, when he chooses to strengthen his judgment or to satisfy his doubts, is to destroy visible unity. Suppose there to be an equal division of votes, as happened in the famous case of Fénelon, and might as well happen in a general council, the doubt would after all be solved by the final vote of the Pope. And "what is doubtful for twenty selected men is doubtful for the whole human race. Those who suppose that by multiplying the deliberating voices doubt is lessened, must have very little knowledge of men, and can never have sat in a deliberative body." Again, supposing there to present itself one of those questions of divine metaphysics that it is absolutely necessary to refer to the decision of the supreme tribunal. Then our interest is not that it should be decided in such or such a manner, but that it should be decided without delay and without appeal. Besides, the world is now grown too vast for general councils, which seem to be made only for the youth of Christianity. In fine, why pursue futile or mischievous discussions as to whether the Pope is above the Council or the Council above the Pope? In ordinary questions in which a king is conscious of sufficient light, he decides them himself, while

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the others in which he is not conscious of this light, he transfers to the States-General presided over by himself, but he is equally sovereign in either case. So with the Pope and the Council. Let us be content to know, in the words of Thomassin,[1] that "the Pope in the midst of his Council is above himself, and that the Council decapitated of its chief is below him."

The vigour with which De Maistre sums up all these pleas for supremacy is very remarkable; and to the crowd of enemies and indifferents, and especially to the statesmen who are among them, he appeals with admirable energy. "What do you want, then? Do you mean that the nations should live without any religion, and do you not begin to perceive that a religion there must be? And does not Christianity, not only by its intrinsic worth but because it is in possession, strike you as preferable to every other? Have you been better contented with other attempts in this way? Peradventure the twelve apostles might please you better than the Theophilanthropists and Martinists? Does the Sermon on the Mount seem to you a passable code of morals? And if the entire people were to regulate their conduct on this model, should you be content? I fancy that I hear you reply affirmatively. Well, since the only object now is to maintain this religion for which you thus declare your preference, how could you have, I do not say the stupidity, but the cruelty,

[1] Thomassin, the eminent French theologian, flourished from the middle to the end of the seventeenth century. The aim of his writings generally was to reconcile conflicting opinions on discipline or doctrine by exhibiting a true sense in all. In this spirit he wrote on the Pope and the Councils, and on the never-ending question of Grace. Among other things, he insisted that all languages could be traced to the Hebrew. He wrote a defence of the edict in which Louis XIV. revoked the Edict of Nantes, contending that it was less harsh than some of the decrees of Theodosius and Justinian, which the holiest fathers of the church had not scrupled to approve—an argument which would now be thought somewhat too dangerous for common use, as cutting both ways. Gibbon made use of his *Discipline de l'Église* in the twentieth chapter, and elsewhere.

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to turn it into a democracy, and to place this precious deposit in the hands of the rabble?

"You attach too much importance to the dogmatic part of this religion. By what strange contradiction would you desire to agitate the universe for some academic quibble, for miserable wranglings about mere words (these are your own terms)? Is it so then that men are led? Will you call the Bishop of Quebec and the Bishop of Luçon to interpret a line of the Catechism? That believers should quarrel about infallibility is what I know, for I see it; but that statesmen should quarrel in the same way about this great privilege, is what I shall never be able to conceive. . . . That all the bishops in the world should be convoked to determine a divine truth necessary to salvation—nothing more natural, if such a method is indispensable; for no effort, no trouble, ought to be spared for so exalted an aim. But if the only point is the establishment of one opinion in the place of another, then the travelling expenses of even one single Infallible are sheer waste. If you want to spare the two most valuable things on earth, time and money, make all haste to write to Rome, in order to procure thence a lawful decision which shall declare the unlawful doubt. Nothing more is needed; policy asks no more."[1]

De Maistre has been surpassed by no thinker that we know of as a defender of the old order. If anybody could rationalise the idea of supernatural intervention in human affairs, the idea of a Papal supremacy, the idea of a spiritual unity, De Maistre's acuteness and intellectual vigour, and, above all, his keen sense of the urgent social need of such a thing being done, would assuredly have enabled him to do it. In 1817, when he wrote the work in which this task is attempted, the

[1] *Du Pape*, bk. i. ch. xvii. p. 117.

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hopelessness of such an achievement was less obvious than it is now. The Bourbons had been restored. The Revolution lay in a deep slumber that many persons excusably took for extinction. Legitimacy and the spiritual system that was its ally in the face of the Revolution, though mostly its rival or foe when they were left alone together, seemed to be restored to the fulness of their power. Many years have elapsed since then, and each year has seen a progressive decay in the principles that were then triumphant. It was not, therefore, without reason that De Maistre warned people against believing "*que la colonne est replacée, parce qu'elle est relevée.*" The solution which he so elaborately recommended to Europe has shown itself desperate and impossible. Catholicism may long remain a vital creed to millions of men, a deep source of spiritual consolation and refreshment, and a bright lamp in perplexities of conduct and morals; but resting on dogmas which cannot by any amount of compromise be incorporated with the daily increasing mass of knowledge, assuming as the condition of its existence forms of the theological hypothesis which all the preponderating influences of contemporary thought concur directly or indirectly in discrediting, upheld by an organisation which its history for several centuries has exposed to the distrust and hatred of men as the sworn enemy of mental freedom and growth, the pretensions of Catholicism to renovate society are among the most pitiable and impotent that ever devout, high-minded, and benevolent persons deluded themselves into maintaining or accepting. Over the modern invader it is as powerless as paganism was over the invaders of old. The barbarians of industrialism, grasping chiefs and mutinous men, give no ear to priest or pontiff, who speak only dead words, who confront modern issues with blind eyes, and who stretch out a palsied

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hand to help. Christianity, according to Lessing's well-known saying, has been tried and failed; the religion of Christ remains to be tried. One would prefer to qualify the first clause, by admitting how much Christianity has done for Europe even with its old organisation, and to restrict the charge of failure within the limits of the modern time. Whether in changed forms and with new supplements the teaching of its founder is destined to be the chief inspirer of the social and human sentiment that seems to be the only spiritual bond capable of uniting men together again in a common and effective faith, is a question which it is unnecessary to discuss here. "*They talk about the first centuries of Christianity,*" said De Maistre, "*I would not be sure that they are over yet.*" Perhaps not; only if the first centuries are not yet over, it is certain that the Christianity of the future will have to be so different from the Christianity of the past, as to demand or deserve another name.

Even if Christianity, itself renewed, could successfully encounter the achievement of renewing society, De Maistre's ideal of a spiritual power controlling the temporal power, and conciliating peoples with their rulers by persuasion and a coercion only moral, appears to have little chance of being realised. The separation of the two powers is sealed, with a completeness that is increasingly visible. The principles on which the process of the emancipation of politics is being so rapidly carried on, demonstrate that the most marked tendencies of modern civilisation are strongly hostile to a renewal of a connection whether of virtual subordination or nominal equality, that has laid such enormous burdens on the consciences and understandings of men. If the church has the uppermost hand, except in primitive times, it impairs freedom; if the state is supreme, it impairs spirituality. The free church in the free

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state is an idea that every day more fully recommends itself to the public opinion of Europe, and the sovereignty of the Pope, like that of all other spiritual potentates, can only be exercised over those who choose of their own accord to submit to it; a sovereignty of a kind that De Maistre thought not much above anarchy.

To conclude, De Maistre's mind was of the highest type of those who fill the air with the arbitrary assumptions of theology, and the abstractions of the metaphysical stage of thought. At every point you meet the peremptorily declared volition of a divine being, or the ontological property of a natural object. The French Revolution is explained by the will of God; and the kings reign because they have the *esprit royal.* Every truth is absolute, not relative; every explanation is universal, not historic. These differences in method and point of view amply explain his arrival at conclusions that seem so monstrous to men who look upon all knowledge as relative, and insist that the only possible road to true opinion lies away from volitions and abstractions in the positive generalisations of experience. There can be no more satisfactory proof of the rapidity with which we are leaving these ancient methods, and the social results they produced, than the willingness with which every rightly instructed mind now admits how indispensable were the first, and how beneficial the second. Those can best appreciate De Maistre and his school, what excellence lay in their aspirations, what wisdom in their system, who know most clearly why their aspirations were hopeless, and what makes their system an anachronism.

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ROBESPIERRE

I

A FRENCH writer has recently published a careful and interesting volume on the famous events that ended in the overthrow of Robespierre and the close of the Reign of Terror.[1] These events are known in the historic calendar as the Revolution of Thermidor in the Year II. After the fall of the monarchy, the Convention decided that the year should begin with the autumnal equinox, and that the enumeration should date from the birth of the Republic. The Year I. opens on September 22, 1792; the Year II. opens on the same day of 1793. The month of Thermidor begins on July 19. The memorable Ninth Thermidor therefore corresponds to July 27, 1794. This has commonly been taken as the date of the commencement of a counter-revolution, and in one sense it was so. Comte, however, and others have preferred to fix the reaction at the execution of Danton (April 5, 1794), or Robespierre's official proclamation of Deism in the Festival of the Supreme Being (May 7, 1794).

M. D'Héricault does not belong to the school of writers who treat the course of history as a great high-road, following a firmly traced line, and set with plain and ineffaceable landmarks. The French Revolution has nearly always been

[1] *La Révolution de Thermidor.* Par Ch. D'Héricault. Paris: Didier, 1876.

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handled in this way, alike by those who think it fruitful in blessings, and by their adversaries, who pronounce it a curse inflicted by the wrath of heaven. Historians have looked at the Revolution as a plain landsman looks at the sea. To the landsman the ocean seems one huge immeasurable flood, obeying a simple law of ebb and flow, and offering to the navigator a single uniform force. Yet in truth we know that the oceanic movement is the product of many forces; the seeming uniformity covers the energy of a hundred currents and counter-currents; the sea-floor is not even, nor the same, but is subject to untold conditions of elevation and subsidence; the sea is not one mass, but many masses moving along definite lines of their own. It is the same with the great tides of history. Wise men shrink from summing them up in single propositions. That the French Revolution led to an immense augmentation of happiness, both for the French and for mankind, can only be denied by the Pope. That it secured its beneficent results untempered by any mixture of evil, can only be maintained by men as mad as Doctor Pangloss. The Greek poetess Corinna said to the youthful Pindar, when he had interwoven all the gods and goddesses in the Theban mythology into a single hymn, that we should sow with the hand and not with the sack. Corinna's monition to the singer is proper to the interpreter of historical truth: he should cull with the hand, and not sweep in with the scythe. It is doubtless mere pedantry to abstain from the widest conception of the sum of a great movement. A clear, definite, and stable idea of the meaning in the history of human progress of such vast groups of events as the Reformation or the Revolution, is indispensable for any one to whom history is a serious study of society. It is just as important, however, not to forget that they were really

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groups of events, and not in either case a single uniform movement. The World-Epos is after all only a file of the morning paper in a state of glorification. A sensible man learns, in everyday life, to abstain from praising and blaming character by wholesale; he becomes content to say of this trait that it is good, and of that act that it was bad. So in history, we become unwilling to join or to admire those who insist upon transferring their sentiment upon the whole to their judgment upon each part. We seek to be allowed to retain a decided opinion as to the final value to mankind of a long series of transactions, and yet not to commit ourselves to set the same estimate on each transaction in particular, still less on each person associated with it. Why shall we not prize the general results of the Reformation, without being obliged to defend John of Leyden and the Munster Anabaptists?

M. D'Héricault's volume naturally suggests such reflections as these. Of all the men of the Revolution, Robespierre has suffered most from the audacious idolatry of some writers, and the splenetic impatience of others. M. Louis Blanc and M. Ernest Hamel talk of him as an angel or a prophet, and the Ninth Thermidor is a red day indeed in their martyrology. Michelet and M. D'Héricault treat him as a mixture of Cagliostro and Caligula, both a charlatan and a miscreant. We are reminded of the commencement of an address of the French Senate to the first Bonaparte: "Sire," they began, "the desire for perfection is one of the worst maladies that can afflict the human mind." This bold aphorism touches one of the roots of the judgments we pass both upon men and events. It is because people so irrationally think fit to insist upon perfection, that Robespierre's admirers would fain deny he ever had a fault, and the tacit adoption of the same impracticable standard makes

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it easier for Robespierre's wholesale detractors to deny that he had a single virtue or performed a single service. The point of view is essentially unfit for history. The real subject of history is the improvement of social arrangements, and no conspicuous actor in public affairs since the world began saw the true direction of improvement with an absolutely unerring eye from the beginning of his career to the end. It is folly for the historian, as it is for the statesman, to strain after the imaginative unity of the dramatic creator. Social progress is an affair of many small pieces and slow accretions, and the interest of historic study lies in tracing, amid the immense turmoil of events and through the confusion of voices, the devious course of the sacred torch, as it shifts from bearer to bearer. And it is not the bearers who are most interesting, but the torch.

In the old Flemish town of Arras, known in the diplomatic history of the fifteenth century by a couple of important treaties, and famous in the industrial history of the Middle Ages for its pre-eminence in the manufacture of the most splendid kind of tapestry hangings, Maximilian Robespierre was born in May 1758. He was therefore no more than five-and-thirty years old when he came to his ghastly end in 1794. His father was a lawyer, and, though the surname of the family had the prefix of nobility, they belonged to the middle class. When this decorative prefix became dangerous, Maximilian Derobespierre dropped it. His great rival, Danton, was less prudent or less fortunate, and one of the charges made against him was that he had styled himself Monsieur D'Anton.

Robespierre's youth was embittered by sharp misfortune. His mother died when he was only seven years old, and his father had so little courage

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under the blow that he threw up his practice, deserted his children, and died in purposeless wanderings through Germany. Friendly kinsfolk charged themselves with the maintenance of the four orphans. Maximilian was sent to the school of the town, whence he proceeded with a sizarship to the college of Louis-le-Grand in Paris. He was an apt and studious pupil, but austere, and disposed to the sombre cast of spirits that is common enough where a lad of some sensibility and much self-esteem finds himself stamped with a badge of social inferiority. Robespierre's worshippers love to dwell on his fondness for birds: with the universal passion of mankind for legends of the saints, they tell how the untimely death of a favourite pigeon afflicted him with anguish so poignant that, even sixty long years after, it made his sister's heart ache to look back upon the pain of that tragic moment. Always a sentimentalist, Robespierre was from boyhood a devout enthusiast for the high priest of the sentimental tribe. Rousseau was then passing the last squalid days of his life among the meadows and woods at Ermenonville. Robespierre, who could not have been more than twenty at the time, for Rousseau died in the summer of 1778, is said to have gone on a reverential pilgrimage in search of an oracle from the lonely sage, as Boswell and Gibbon and a hundred others had gone before him. Rousseau was wont to use his real adorers as ill as he used his imaginary enemies. Robespierre may well have shared the discouragement of the enthusiastic father who informed Rousseau that he was about to bring up his son on the principles of *Emilius*. "Then so much the worse," cried the perverse philosopher, "both for you and your son." If he had been endowed with second sight, he would have thought at least as rude a presage due to this last and most ill-starred of a whole generation of neophytes.

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In 1781 Robespierre returned to Arras, and amid the welcome of his relatives and the good hopes of friends began the practice of an advocate. For eight years he led an active and seemly life. He was not wholly pure from that indiscretion of the young appetite about which the world is mute, but whose better ordering and governance would give a diviner brightness to the earth. Still, if he did not escape the ordeal of youth, Robespierre was frugal, laborious, and persevering. His domestic amiability made him the delight of his sister, and his zealous self-sacrifice for the education and advancement in life of his younger brother was afterwards repaid by Augustin Robespierre's devotion through all the fierce and horrible hours of Thermidor. Though cold in temperament, extremely reserved in manners, and fond of industrious seclusion, Robespierre did not disdain the social diversions of the town. He was a member of a reunion of Rosati, who sang madrigals and admired one another's bad verses. Those who love the ironical surprises of fate, may picture the young man who was doomed to play so terrible a part in terrible affairs, going through the harmless follies of a ceremonial reception by the Rosati, taking three deep breaths over a rose, solemnly fastening the emblem to his coat, emptying a glass of rose-red wine at a draught to the good health of the company, and finally reciting couplets that Voltaire would have found almost as detestable as the Law of Prairial or the Festival of the Supreme Being. More laudable efforts of ambition were prize essays, in which Robespierre has the merit of taking the right side in important questions. He protested against the inhumanity of laws inflicting civil infamy upon the innocent family of a convicted criminal. And he protested against the still more wicked cruelty that reduced unfortunate children

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born out of wedlock to something like the status of the mediaeval serf. Robespierre's compositions at this time do not rise above the ordinary level of declaiming mediocrity, but they promised a manhood of benignity and enlightenment. To compose prize essays on political reforms was better than to ignore or to oppose political reform. But the course of events afterwards owed their least desirable bias to the fact that such compositions were the nearest approach to political training that so many of the revolutionary leaders underwent. One is inclined to apply to practical politics Arthur Young's sensible remark about the endeavour of the French to improve the quality of their wool: "A cultivator at the head of a sheep-farm of 3000 or 4000 acres, would in a few years do more for their wools than all the academicians and philosophers will effect in ten centuries."

In his profession he distinguished himself in one or two causes of local celebrity. An innovating citizen had been ordered by the authorities to remove a lightning-conductor from his house within three days, as being a mischievous practical paradox, as well as a danger and an annoyance to his neighbours. Robespierre pleaded the innovator's case on appeal, and won it. He defended a poor woman who had been wrongfully accused by a monk belonging to the powerful corporation of a great neighbouring abbey. The young advocate did not even shrink from manfully arguing a case against the august Bishop of Arras himself. His independence did him no harm. The Bishop afterwards appointed him to the post of judge or legal assessor in the episcopal court. This tribunal was a remnant of what had once been the sovereign authority and jurisdiction of the Bishops of Arras. That a court with the power of life and death should thus exist by the side

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of a proper corporation of civil magistrates, is an illustration of the inextricable labyrinth of the French law and its administration on the eve of the Revolution. Robespierre did not hold his office long. Every one has heard the striking story, how the young judge, whose name was within half a dozen years to take a place in the popular mind of France and of Europe with the bloodiest monsters of myth or history, resigned his post in a fit of remorse after condemning a murderer to be executed. "He is a criminal, no doubt," Robespierre kept groaning in reply to the consolations of his sister, for women are apt to be more positive creatures than men: "a criminal, no doubt; but to put a man to death!"

Among Robespierre's associates in the festive mummeries of the Rosati was a young officer of Engineers, who was destined to be his colleague in the dread Committee of Public Safety, and to leave an important name in French history. In the garrison of Arras, Carnot was quartered,—that iron head, whose genius for the administrative organisation of war achieved even greater things for the new Republic than the genius of Louvois had achieved for the old monarchy. Carnot surpassed not only Louvois, but perhaps all other names save one in modern military history, by uniting to the most powerful gifts for organisation, both the strategic talent that planned the momentous campaign of 1794, and the splendid personal energy and skill that prolonged the defence of Antwerp against the allied army in 1814. Partisans dream of the unrivalled future of peace, glory, and freedom that would have fallen to the lot of France, if only the gods had brought about a hearty union between the military genius of Carnot and the political genius of Robespierre. So, no doubt, after the restoration of Charles II. in England, there were good men who thought

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that all would have gone very differently, if only the genius of the great creator of the Ironsides had taken counsel with the genius of Venner, the Fifth-Monarchy man, and Feak, the Anabaptist prophet.

The time was now come when such men as Robespierre were to be tried with fire, when they were to drink the cup of fury, and the dregs of the cup of trembling. Sibyls and prophets have already spoken their inexorable decree, as Goethe has said, on the day that first gives the man to the world; no time and no might can break the stamped mould of his character; only as life wears on, do all its aforeshapen lines come into light. He is launched into a sea of external conditions as independent of his own will as the temperament with which he confronts them. It is action that tries, and variation of circumstances. The leaden chains of use bind many an ugly unsuspected prisoner in the soul; and when the habit of their lives has been sundered, the most immaculate are capable of antics beyond prevision. A great crisis of the world was prepared for Robespierre and those others, his allies or his destroyers, who with him came like the lightning and went like the wind.

At the end of 1788 the King of France found himself forced to summon the States-General. It was the first assembly since 1614. On the memorable Fourth of May 1789, Robespierre appeared at Versailles as one of the representatives of the third estate of his native province of Artois. The excitement and enthusiasm of the elections to this renowned assembly, the immense demands and boundless expectations they disclosed, would have warned a cool observer of events, if in the heated air a cool observer could have been found, that the hour had struck for the fulfilment of those grim apprehensions of revolution that had risen

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in the minds of many shrewd men, good and bad, in the course of the previous half-century. No cardinal event in history ever comes wholly unforeseen. The antecedent causes are so wide-reaching, many, and continuous, that their direction is always sure to strike the eye of one or more observers in all its significance. Louis the Fifteenth, whose invincible weariness and heavy disgust veiled a penetrating discernment, measured accurately the scope of the conflict between the crown and the parlements: but, said he, things as they are will last my time. Under the roof of his own palace at Versailles, in the apartment of Madame de Pompadour's famous physician, one of Quesnay's economic disciples had cried out, "The realm is in a sore way; it will never be cured without a great internal commotion; but woe to those who have to do with it; into such work the French go with no slack hand." Rousseau, in a passage in the *Confessions*, not only divines a speedy convulsion, but with striking practical sagacity enumerates the political and social causes that were unavoidably drawing France to the edge of the abyss. Lord Chesterfield, so different a man from Rousseau, declared as early as 1752, that he saw in France every symptom history had taught him to regard as the forerunner of deep change; before the end of the century, so his prediction ran, both the trade of king and the trade of priest in France would be shorn of half their glory. D'Argenson in the same year declared a revolution inevitable, and with a curious precision of anticipation assured himself that, if once the necessity arose of convoking the States-General, they would not assemble in vain: *qu'on y prenne garde! ils seraient fort sérieux!* Oliver Goldsmith, idly wandering through France, towards 1755, discerned in the mutinous attitude of the judicial corporations, that the genius of freedom was entering the

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kingdom in disguise, and that a succession of three weak monarchs would end in the emancipation of the people of France. The most touching of all these presentiments is to be found in a private letter of the great Empress, the mother of Marie Antoinette herself. Maria Theresa describes the ruined state of the French monarchy, and only prays that if it be doomed to ruin, at least the blame may not fall upon her daughter. The Empress had not learnt that when the giants of social force are advancing from the sombre shadow of the past, our poor prayers are of no more avail than the unbodied visions of a dream.

The old popular assembly of the realm was not resorted to before every means of dispensing with so drastic a remedy had been tried. Historians sometimes write as if Turgot were the only able and reforming minister of the century. Heaven forbid that we should put any other minister on a level with that high and beneficent figure. But Turgot was not the first statesman, both able and patriotic, who had been disgraced for want of compliance with the conditions of success at court; he was only the last of a series. Chauvelin, a man of vigour and capacity, was dismissed with ignominy in 1736. Machault, a reformer, at once courageous and wise, shared the same fate twenty years later; and in his case revolution was as cruel and as heedless as reaction, for, at the age of ninety-one, the old man was dragged, blind and deaf, before the Revolutionary Tribunal and thence despatched to the guillotine. Between Chauvelin and Machault, the elder D'Argenson, who was greater than either of them, had been raised to power, and as speedily hurled down from it (1747), for no better reason than that his manners were uncouth, and that he would not waste his time in frivolities that were the breath of life in the

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great gallery at Versailles and on the smooth-shaven lawns of Fontainebleau.

Not only had wise counsellors been tried; consultative assemblies had been tried as well. Necker had been dismissed in 1781, after publishing the memorable *Report* that first initiated the nation in the elements of financial knowledge. The disorder waxed greater, and the monarchy drew nearer to bankruptcy each year. The only nineteenth-century parallel to the state of things in France under Louis the Sixteenth is to be sought in the state of things in Egypt or in Turkey. Louis the Fourteenth had left a debt of between two and three thousand millions of livres, but this had been wiped out by the heroic operations of Law; operations, by the way, that have never yet been scientifically criticised. But the debt soon grew again, by foolish wars, by the prodigality of the court, and by the rapacity of the nobles. It amounted in 1789 to something like two hundred and forty millions sterling; and it is interesting to notice that this was exactly the sum of the public debt of Great Britain at the same time. The year's excess of expenditure over receipts in 1774 was about fifty millions of livres: in 1787 it was one hundred and forty millions, or according to a different computation even two hundred millions. The material case was not at all desperate, if only the court had been less infatuated, and the spirit of the privileged orders had been less blind. The fatality of the situation lay in the characters of a handful of men and women. For France was abundant in resources, and even at this moment was far from unprosperous, in spite of the incredible trammels of law and custom. An able financier, with the support of a popular chamber and the assent of the sovereign, could have had no difficulty in restoring the public credit. But the conditions, simple as they might seem

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to a patriot or to posterity, were unattainable so long as power remained with a caste that were anything we please, only not patriots. An Assembly of Notables was brought together, but it was only the phantasm of national representation. Yet the situation was so serious that even this body, arbitrary of origin as it was, still was willing to accept vital reforms. The privileged order, who were then the worst conservative party in Europe, immediately persuaded the magisterial corporation to resist the Notables. The judicial corporation or Parlement of Paris had been suppressed under Louis the Fifteenth, and unfortunately revived again at the accession of his grandson. By the inconvenient constitution of the French government, the assent of that body was indispensable to fiscal legislation, on the ground that such legislation was part of the general police of the realm. The king's minister, now Loménie de Brienne, devised a new judicial constitution. But the churchmen, the nobles, and the lawyers all united in protestations against the blow. The common people are not always the best judges of a remedy for the evils under which they are the worst sufferers, and they broke out in disorder both in Paris and the provinces. They discerned an attack upon their local independence. Nobody would accept office in the new courts, and the administration of justice was at a standstill. A loan was thrown upon the market, but the public could not be persuaded to take it up. It was impossible to collect the taxes. The interest on the national debt was unpaid, and the fundholder was dismayed and exasperated by an announcement that only two-fifths would be discharged in cash. A very large part of the national debt was held in the form of annuities for lives, and men who had invested their savings on the credit of the government, saw themselves

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left without a provision. The total number of fundholders cannot be ascertained with any precision, but it must have been very considerable, especially in Paris and the other large cities. Add to these all the civil litigants in the kingdom, who had portions of their property virtually sequestrated by the suspension of the courts into which the property had been taken. The resentment of this immense body of defrauded public creditors and injured private suitors explains the alienation of the middle class from the monarchy. In the convulsions of our own time, the moneyed interests have been on one side, and the population without money on the other. But in the first and greatest convulsions, those who had nothing to lose found their animosities shared by those who had had something to lose, and had lost it.

Deliberative assemblies, then, had been tried, and ministers had been tried; both had failed, and no other device was left, except one that was destructive to absolute monarchy. Louis the Sixteenth was in 1789 in much the same case as that of the King of England in 1640. Charles had done his best to raise money without any parliament for twelve years: he had lost patience with the Short Parliament; finally, he was driven without choice or alternative to face as he best could the stout resolution and the wise patriotism of the Long Parliament. Men sometimes wonder how it was that Louis, when he came to find the National Assembly unmanageable, and discovering how rapidly he was drifting towards the thunders of the revolutionary cataract, did not break up a Chamber over which neither the court, nor even a minister so popular as Necker, had the least control. It is a question whether the sword would not have broken in his hand. Even supposing, however, that the army would have consented to a violent movement against the Assembly, the king would

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still have been left in the same desperate straits from which he had looked to the States-General to extricate him. He might perhaps have dispersed the Assembly; he could not disperse debt and deficit. Those monsters would have haunted him implacably. There was no new formula of exorcism, nor any untried enchantment. The success of violent designs against the National Assembly, had success been possible, could, after all, have been followed by no other consummation than the relapse of France into the anarchy of Poland, or the sullen decrepitude of Turkey.

This will seem no better than fatalism. But, in truth, there are two popular ways of reading the history of events between 1789 and 1794, and each of them seems as bad as the other. According to one, whatever happened in the Revolution was good and admirable, because it happened. According to the other, something good and admirable was always attainable, and, if only bad men had not interposed, always ready to happen. Of course the only sensible view is that many of the revolutionary solutions were detestable, but no other solution was within reach. This is undoubtedly the best of possible worlds; if the best is not so good as we could wish, that is the fault of the possibilities. Such a doctrine is neither fatalism nor optimism, but an honest recognition of long chains of cause and effect in human things.

The great gathering of chosen men was first called States-General; then it called itself National Assembly; it is commonly known in history as the Constituent Assembly. The name is of ironical association, for the constitution which it framed after much travail endured for no more than a few months. Its deliberations lasted from May 1789 until September 1791. Among its members were three principal groups. There was, first, a band of blind adherents of the old system of government

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with all or most of its abuses. Second, there was a Centre of timid and one-eyed men, who were for transforming the old absolutist system into something that should resemble the constitution of our own country. Finally, there was a Left, with some differences of shade, but all agreeing in the necessity of a thorough remodelling of every institution and most of the usages of the country. "Silence, you thirty votes!" cried Mirabeau one day, when he was interrupted by the dissents of the Mountain. This was the original measure of the party that, in the twinkling of an eye, was to wield the destinies of France. In our own time we have wondered at the rapidity with which a Chamber that was one day on the point of bringing back the grand-nephew of Louis the Sixteenth, found itself a little later voting the Republic that has since been ratified by the nation, and has at this moment the ardent good wishes of every enlightened politician in Europe. In the same way it is startling to think that within three years of the beheading of Louis the Sixteenth, there was probably not one serious republican in the representative assembly of France. Yet it is always so. We might make just the same remark of the House of Commons at Westminster in 1640, and of the Assembly of Massachusetts or of New York as late as 1770. The final flash of a long unconscious train of thought or intent is ever a shock. It is a mistake to set these swift changes down to political levity rather than to quickness of political intuition. It was the king's attempt at flight in the summer of 1791 that first created a republican party. It was this unhappy exploit, and no theoretical preferences, that awoke France to the necessity of choosing between the sacrifice of monarchy and the restoration of territorial aristocracy.

Political intuition was never one of Robespierre's conspicuous gifts. But he had a doctrine that for

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a certain time served the same purpose. Rousseau had kindled in him a fervid democratic enthusiasm, and had penetrated his mind with the principle of the Sovereignty of the People. This famous dogma contained implicitly within it the more indisputable and the better truth that a society ought to be regulated with a view to the happiness of the people. Such a principle made it easier for Robespierre to interpret rightly the first phases of the revolutionary movement. It helped him to discern that the concentrated physical force of the populace was the only sure protection against a civil war. And if a civil war had broken out in 1789, instead of 1793, all the advantages of authority would have been against the popular party. The first insurrection of Paris is associated with the harangue of Camille Desmoulins at the Palais Royal, with the fall of the Bastille, with the murder of the governor, and a hundred other scenes of melodramatic horror and the blood-red picturesque. The insurrection of the Fourteenth of July 1789 taught Robespierre a lesson of practical politics that exactly fitted in with his previous theories. In his resentment against the oppressive disorder of monarchy and feudalism, he had accepted the counter principle that the people can do no wrong, and nobody of sense now doubts that in their first great act the people of Paris did what was right. Six days after the fall of the Bastille, the Centre were for issuing a proclamation denouncing popular violence and ordering rigorous vigilance. Robespierre was then so little known in the Assembly that even his name was usually misspelt in the journals. From his obscure bench on the Mountain he cried out with bitter vehemence against the proposed proclamation :—"Revolt! But this revolt is liberty. The battle is not at its end. To-morrow, it may be, the shameful designs against us will be renewed; and who will there be then to repulse them, if

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beforehand we declare the very men to be rebels, who have rushed to arms for our protection and safety?" This was the cardinal truth of the situation. Everybody knows Mirabeau's saying about Robespierre:—"That man will go far: he believes every word that he says!" This is much, but it is only half. It is not only that the man of power believes what he says; what he believes must fit in with the facts and the demands of the time. Now Robespierre's firmness of conviction happened at this stage to be rightly matched by his clearness of sight.

It is true that a passionate mob, its unearthly admixture of laughter with fury, of vacancy with deadly concentration, is as terrible as an uncouth antediluvian, or the unfamiliar monsters of the sea, or one of the giant plants that make men shudder with mysterious fear. The history of our own country in the eighteenth century tells of the riots against meeting-houses in Doctor Sacheverell's time, and the riots against Papists and their abettors in Lord George Gordon's time, and Church-and-King riots in Doctor Priestley's time. It would be too daring, therefore, to maintain that the rabble of the poor are sure to have any more unerring political judgment than the rabble of the opulent. But, in France in 1789, Robespierre was justified in saying that revolt meant liberty. If there had been no revolt in July, the court party would have had time to mature their infatuated designs of violence against the Assembly. In October these designs had come to life again. The royalists at Versailles had exultant banquets, at which, in the presence of the queen, they drank confusion to all patriots, and trampled the new emblem of freedom passionately underfoot. The news of this odious folly soon travelled to Paris. Its significance was speedily understood by a populace whose wits were sharpened by famine. Thousands of fire-eyed

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women and men tramped intrepidly out towards Versailles. If they had done less, the Assembly would have been dispersed or arbitrarily decimated, even though such a measure would certainly have left the government in desperation.

At that dreadful moment of the Sixth of October, amid the slaughter of guards and the frantic yells of hatred against the queen, it is no wonder that some were found to urge the king to flee to Metz. If he had accepted the advice, the course of the Revolution would have been different; but its march would have been just as irresistible, for revolution lay in the force of a hundred combined circumstances. Louis, however, rejected these counsels, and suffered the mob to carry him in bewildering procession to his capital and his prison. That great man who was watching French affairs with such consuming eagerness from distant Beaconsfield in our English Buckinghamshire, instantly divined that this procession from Versailles to the Tuileries marked the fall of the monarchy. "A revolution in sentiment, manners, and moral opinions, the most important of all revolutions in a word," was in Burke's judgment to be dated from the Sixth of October 1789.

The events of that day did, indeed, give its definite cast to the situation. The moral authority of the sovereign came to an end, along with the ancient and reverend mystery of the inviolability of his person. The Count d'Artois, the king's second brother, as incurably addicted to sinister and suicidal counsels in 1789 as he was when he overthrew his own throne forty years later, had run away from peril and from duty after the insurrection of July. On the insurrection of October, a troop of the nobles of the court followed him. The personal cowardice of the Emigrants was only matched by their political blindness. Many of the most unwise measures in the Assembly were only passed by small majorities, and the majorities

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would have been transformed into minorities, if in the early days of the Revolution these unworthy men had only stood firm at their posts. Selfish oligarchies have scarcely ever been wanting in courage. The emigrant noblesse of France are almost the only instance of a great privileged and territorial caste that had as little bravery as they had patriotism. The explanation is that they had been an oligarchy, not of power or duty, but of self-indulgence. They were crushed by Richelieu to secure the unity of the monarchy. They now effaced themselves at the Revolution, and this secured that far greater object, the unity of the nation.

The disappearance of so many of the nobles from France was not the only abdication on the part of conservative power. Cowed and terrified by the events of October, no less than three hundred members of the Assembly sought to resign. The average attendance even at the most important sittings was often incredibly small. Thus the Chamber came to have little more moral authority in face of the people of Paris than had the king himself. The people of Paris had themselves become, in a day, the masters of France.

This immense change led gradually to a decisive alteration in the position of Robespierre. He found the situation of affairs at last falling into perfect harmony with his doctrine. Rousseau had taught him that the people ought to be sovereign, and now the people were being recognised as sovereign *de facto* no less than *de jure*. Any limitations on the new divine right united the horror of blasphemy to the secular wickedness of political treason. After the Assembly had come to Paris, a famishing mob in a moment of mad fury murdered an unfortunate baker, suspected of keeping back bread. These paroxysms led to the enactment of a new martial law. Robespierre spoke vehemently against it;

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such a law implied a wrongful distrust of the people. Then discussions followed as to the property qualification of an elector. Citizens were classed as active and passive. Only those were to have votes who paid direct taxes to the amount of three days' wages in the year. Robespierre flung himself upon this too famous distinction with bitter tenacity. If all men are equal, he cried, then all men ought to have votes; if he who only pays the amount of one day's work has fewer rights than another who pays the amount of three days, why should not the man who pays ten days have more rights than the other who only pays the earnings of three days? This kind of reasoning had little weight with the Chamber, but it made the reasoner very popular with the throng in the galleries. Even within the Assembly, influence gradually came to the man who had a parcel of immutable axioms and postulates, and who was ready with a deduction and a phrase for each case as it arose. He began to stand out like a needle of sharp rock, amid the flitting shadows of uncertain purpose and vapoury drift.

Robespierre had no social conception, and he had nothing that can be described as a policy. He was the prophet of a sect, and had at this period none of the aims of the chief of a political party. What he had was democratic doctrine, and an intrepid logic. And Robespierre's intrepid logic was the nearest approach to calm force and coherent character the first three years of the Revolution brought into prominence. When the Assembly met, Necker was the popular idol. Almost within a few weeks, this well-meaning, but incompetent divinity had slipped from his woolsack, and Lafayette had taken his place. Mirabeau came next. The ardent and animated genius of his eloquence fitted him above all men to ride the whirlwind and direct the storm. And on the memorable Twenty-third of June 1789,

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he had shown the genuine audacity and resource of a revolutionary statesman, when he stirred the Chamber to defy the king's demand, and hailed the royal usher with the resounding words: "You, sir, have neither place nor right of speech. Go tell those who sent you that we are here by the will of the people, and only bayonets shall drive us hence!" But Mirabeau bore a tainted character, and was distrusted. "Ah, how the immorality of my youth," he used to say, in words that sum up the tragedy of many a puissant life, "how the immorality of my youth hinders the public good!" The event proved that the popular suspicion was just: the patriot is now no longer merely suspected, but known to have sullied his hands with the money of the court. He did not sell himself, it has been said; he allowed himself to be paid. The distinction was too subtle for men doing battle for their lives and for freedom, and Mirabeau's popularity waned towards the middle of 1790. The next favourite was Barnave, the generous and high-minded spokesman of those sanguine spirits who to the very end hoped against hope to save both the throne and its occupant. By the spring of 1791 Barnave followed his predecessors into disfavour. The Assembly was engaged on the burning question of the government of the colonies. Were the negro slaves to be admitted to citizenship, or was a legislature of planters to be entrusted with the task of social reformation? Our own generation has seen in the Republic of the West what strife this political difficulty is capable of raising. Barnave pronounced against the negroes. Robespierre, on the contrary, declaimed against any limitation of the right of the negro, as a compromise with the avarice, pride, and cruelty of a governing race, and a guilty trafficking with the rights of man. Barnave from that day saw that his laurel crown had gone to Robespierre.

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If the people "called him noble that was now their hate, him vile that was their garland," they did not transfer their affections without sound reason. Barnave's sensibility was too easily touched. There are many politicians in every epoch whose principles grow slack at the approach of the golden sun of royalty. Barnave was one of those sent to bring back the fugitive king and queen from Varennes, and the coach journey by their side unstrung his spirit. He became one of the court's clandestine advisers. Men of this weak susceptibility of imagination are not fit for times of revolution. To be on the side of the court was to betray the cause of the nation. We cannot take too much pains to realise that the voluntary conversion of Louis the Sixteenth to a popular constitution and the abolition of feudalism, was practically as impossible as the conversion of Pope Pius the Ninth to the doctrine of a free church in a free state. Those who believe in the miracle of free will may think of this as they please. Sensible people who accept the sensible account of human character, know that the sudden transformation of a man or a woman brought up to middle age as the heir to centuries of absolutist tradition, into adherents of a government that agreed with the doctrines of Locke and Milton, was only possible on condition of supernatural interference. The king's good nature was no substitute for political capacity or insight. An instructive measure of the degree in which he possessed these two qualities may be found in that deplorable diary of his, where on such days as the Fourteenth of July, when the Bastille fell, and the Sixth of October, when he was carried in triumph from Versailles to the Tuileries, he made the simple entry, "*Rien.*" And he had no firmness. It was as difficult to keep the king to a purpose, La Marck said to Mirabeau, as to keep together a number of well-oiled ivory balls. Louis,

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moreover, was guided by a more energetic and less compliant character than his own.

Marie Antoinette's high mien in adversity, and the contrast between the dazzling splendour of her first years and the scenes of outrage and bloody death that made the climax of her fate, could not but strike the imaginations of men. Such contrasts are the very stuff of which Tragedy, the gorgeous muse with scepter'd pall, loves to weave her most imposing raiment. But history must be just; and the character of the queen had far more concern in the disaster of the first five years of the Revolution than had the character of Robespierre. The popular hatred for Marie Antoinette sprang from a sound instinct. We shall never know how much or how little truth was in those frightful charges against her, that may still be read in a thousand pamphlets. These imputed depravities far surpass anything that John Knox ever said against Mary Stuart, or that Juvenal has recorded against Messalina; and, perhaps, for the only parallel, we must look to the stories of the Byzantine secretary against Theodora, the too famous empress of Justinian and the persecutor of Belisarius. We have to remember that all the revolutionary portraits are distorted by furious passion, and that Marie Antoinette may no more deserve to be compared to Mary Stuart than Robespierre deserves to be compared to Ezzelino or to Alva. The aristocrats were the libellers, if libels they were. It is at least certain that, from the unlucky hour when the Austrian archduchess crossed the French frontier, a childish bride of fourteen, down to the hour when the Queen of France made the attempt to recross it in resentful flight one-and-twenty years afterwards, Marie Antoinette was ignorant, unteachable, blind to events and deaf to good counsels, a bitter grief to her heroic mother, the evil genius of her husband, the despair of her truest advisers, and an exceedingly bad friend

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to the people of France. When Burke had that immortal vision of her at Versailles—"just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in, glittering like the morning star, full of life and splendour and joy"—we know from the correspondence between Maria Theresa and her minister at Versailles, that what Burke really saw was no divinity, but a troublesome schoolgirl, an accomplice in all the ignoble intrigues, and a sharer of all the small busy passions, that convulse an unordered court. The levity that came with her Lorraine blood, broke out in incredible dissipations; in indiscreet visits to the masked balls at the opera; in midnight parades and mystifications on the terrace at Versailles; in insensate gambling. "The court of France is turned into a gaming-hell," said the Emperor Joseph, the queen's own brother: "if they do not amend, the revolution will be cruel." These vices or follies were less mischievous than her intervention in affairs of state. Here her levity was as marked as in the affairs of the boudoir and the ante-chamber, and here to levity she added both dissimulaton and vindictiveness. It was the queen's influence that procured the dismissal of the two virtuous ministers by whose aid the king was striving to arrest the decay of the government of his kingdom. Malesherbes was distasteful to her for no better reason than that she wanted his post for some favourite's favourite. Against Turgot she conspired with tenacious animosity, because he had suppressed a sinecure she designed for a court parasite, and because he would not support her caprice on behalf of a worthless creature of her faction. These two admirable men were disgraced on the same day. The queen wrote to her mother that she had not meddled in the affair. This was false, for she had even sought to have Turgot thrown into the Bastille. "I am as one dashed to

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the ground," cried Voltaire, now nearing his end. "Never can we console ourselves for having seen the golden age dawn and vanish. My eyes see only death in front of me, now that Turgot is gone. The rest of my days must be all bitterness."

When people write hymns of pity for the queen, we may recall the poor woman whom Arthur Young met, as he was walking up a hill to ease his horse near Mars-le-Tour. Though the unfortunate creature was only twenty-eight, she might have been taken for sixty or seventy, her figure was so bent, her face so furrowed and hardened by toil. Her husband, she said, had a morsel of land, one cow, and a poor little horse, yet he had to pay forty-two pounds of wheat and three chickens to one Seigneur, and one hundred and sixty pounds of oats, one chicken, and one franc to another, besides very heavy *tailles* and other taxes; and they had seven children. She had heard that "something was to be done by some great folks for such poor ones, but she did not know who nor how, but God send us better, for the *tailles* and the dues grind us to the earth." It was such hapless drudges as this who replenished the queen's gaming tables at Versailles. Thousands of them dragged on the burden of their harassed and desperate days, less like men and women than beasts of the field wrung and tortured and mercilessly overladen, in order that the queen might gratify her childish passion for diamonds, or lavish money and estates on worthless female Polignacs and Lamballes, or kill time at a cost of five hundred louis a night at lansquenet and the faro bank. The queen, it is true, was in all this no worse than other dissipated women. She did not realise that it was the system to which she had stubbornly committed herself, that drove the people of the fields to cut their crops green, to be baked in the oven, because their hunger could not wait; or made them cower whole days in their

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beds, because misery seemed to gnaw them there with a duller fang. That she was unconscious of its effect, makes no difference in the real drift of her policy; makes no difference in the judgment we ought to pass upon it, nor in the gratitude that is owed to the stern men who rose up to consume her and her court with flame. The queen and the courtiers, and the hard-faring woman of Mars-le-Tour, and that whole generation, have long been dust and shadow; they have vanished from the earth, as if they were no more than the fire-flies that the peasant of the Italian poet saw dancing in the vineyard as he took his evening rest on the hillside. They have all fled back into the impenetrable shade whence they came; and if social equity is not a chimera, Marie Antoinette was the protagonist of the worst of causes.

Let us return to the shaping of the Constitution, not forgetting that its stability was to depend upon the queen. Robespierre left some characteristic marks on the final arrangements. He imposed upon the Assembly a motion prohibiting any member of it from accepting office under the Crown for a period of four years after the dissolution. Robespierre from this time forth constantly illustrated a very singular and unfortunate truth; namely, that the most ostentatious faith in humanity in general seems always to beget the sharpest distrust of all human beings in particular. He proceeded further in the same direction. It was Robespierre who persuaded the Chamber to pass a self-denying ordinance. All its members were declared ineligible for a seat in the legislature that was to replace them. The members of the Right on this occasion went with their bitter foes of the Extreme Left, and to both parties have been imputed sinister and Machiavellian motives. The Right, aware that their own return to the

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new Assembly was impossible, were delighted to reduce the men with whom they had been carrying on incensed battle for two long years, to their own obscurity and impotence. Robespierre, on the other hand, is accused of a jealous desire to exclude Barnave from power. He is accused also of a deliberate intention to weaken the new legislature, in order to secure the preponderance of the Parisian clubs. There is no evidence that these malignant feelings were in Robespierre's mind. The reasons he gave were exactly of the kind that we should have expected to weigh with a man of his calibre. There is even a certain truth in them, not inconsistent with the experience of a parliamentary country like our own. To talk, he said, of the transmission of light and experience from one Assembly to another, was to distrust the public spirit. The influence of opinion and the general good grows less, as the influence of parliamentary orators grows greater. He had no taste, he proceeded with one of his chilly sneers, for the new science that was styled the tactics of great assemblies; it was too like intrigue. Nothing but truth and reason ought to reign in a legislature. He did not like the idea of clever men becoming dominant by skilful tactics, and then perpetuating their empire from one Assembly to another. He wound up his discourse with some theatrical talk about disinterestedness. When he sat down, he was greeted with enthusiastic acclamations, such as a few months before used to greet the stormful Mirabeau, now wrapped in eternal sleep amid the stillness of the new Pantheon. The folly of Robespierre's inferences is obvious enough. If only truth and reason ought to weigh in a legislature, then it is all the more important not to exclude any body of men with whom truth and reason may possibly enter. Robespierre had striven hard to remove all restrictions from admission to the

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electoral franchise. He did not see that to limit the choice of candidates was in itself the most grievous of all restrictions.

The common view has been that the Constitution of 1791 perished because its creators were thus disabled from defending the work of their hands. This view led to a grave mistake four years later, after Robespierre had gone to his grave. The Convention, framing the Constitution of the Year III., decided that two-thirds of the existing Assembly should keep their places, and only one-third should be popularly elected. This led to the revolt of the Thirteenth Vendémiaire, and afterwards to the *coup d'État* of the Eighteenth Fructidor. In that sense, no doubt, Robespierre's proposal was the indirect root of much mischief. But it is childish to believe that if a hundred of the most prominent members of the Constituent had found seats in the new Assembly, they would have saved the Constitution. Their experience, the loss of which it is the fashion to deplore, could have had no application to the strange combinations of untoward circumstance now rising up with such deadly rapidity in every quarter of the horizon, like vast sombre banks of impenetrable cloud. Prudence in new cases can do nothing on grounds of retrospect. The work of the Constituent was doomed by the very nature of things. Their assumption that the Revolution was made, while all France was still torn by fierce and unappeasable disputes as to seignorial rights, was one of the most striking pieces of self-deception in history. It is told how in the eleventh century, when the fervent hosts of the Crusaders tramped across Europe on their way to deliver the Holy City from the hands of the unbelievers, the wearied children, as they espied each new town that lay in their interminable march, cried out with joyful expectation, "Is not this, then, Jerusalem?" So France had set out

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on a portentous journey, little knowing how far off was the end; lightly taking each poor halting-place for the deeply-longed-for goal; and waxing more fiercely disappointed, as each new height they gained only disclosed yet farther and more unattainable horizons. "Alas," said Burke, "they little know how many a weary step is to be taken, before they can form themselves into a mass which has a true political personality."

An immense revolution had been effected, but by what force were its fruits to be guarded? Each step in the Revolution had raised a host of irreconcilable enemies. The rights of property, the old and jealous associations of local independence, the traditions of personal dignity, the relations of the civil to the spiritual power—these were the momentous matters about which the lawmakers of the Constituent had exercised themselves. The parties of the Chamber had for these two years past been laying mine and counter-mine among the very deepest foundations of society. One by one each great corporation of the old order had been alienated from the new. It was inevitable. Let us look at one or two examples. The monarchy had imposed administrative centralisation upon France without securing national unity. The great provinces that had been slowly added one after the other to the monarchy, while becoming members of the same kingdom, still retained different institutions and isolated usages. The time was now come when France should be France, and its inhabitants Frenchmen, and no longer Bretons, Normans, Gascons, Provençals. The Assembly by a single decree (1790) redivided the country into eighty-three departments. It wiped out at a stroke the separate administrations, the separate parliaments, the peculiar privileges, and even the historic names of the old provinces. We need not dwell on the significance of this change

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here, but will only remark in passing that the stubborn disputes from the time of the Regency downwards, between the Crown and the provincial parliaments turned, under other names and in other forms, upon this very issue of the unification of the law. The Crown was with the progressive party, but it lacked the strength and courage to set aside retrograde local sentiment as the Constituent Assembly was able to set it aside.

Then this prodigious change in the distribution of government was accompanied by no less prodigious a change in the source of power. Popular election replaced the old system of territorial privilege and aristocratic prerogative. The effect of this vital innovation, followed as it was a few months later by a decree abolishing titles and armorial bearings, was to complete the estrangement of the old privileged classes from the revolutionary movement. All that they had meant to concede was the payment of an equal land tax. What was life worth to the noble, if common people were to be allowed to wear arms and to command a company of foot or a troop of horse; if he was no longer to have thousands of acres left waste for the chase; if he was compelled to sue for a vote where he had only yesterday reigned as manorial lord; if, in short, he was at a stroke to lose all those delights of insolence and vanity that had made, not the decoration, but the very substance, of his days?

Nor were the nobles of the sword and the red-heeled slipper the only outraged class. The magistracy of the provincial parliaments were inflamed with resentment against changes that stripped them of the power of exciting against the new government the same factious and impracticable spirit with which they had on so many occasions embarrassed the old. The clergy were thrown even still more violently into opposition. The Assembly, sorely pressed for resources, declared the property

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held by ecclesiastics, amounting to a revenue of not less than eight million pounds sterling a year, or double that amount in modern values, to be the property of the nation. Talleyrand carried a measure decreeing the sale of the ecclesiastical domain. The clergy were as intensely irritated as laymen would have been by a similar assertion of sovereign right. And their irritation was made still more dangerous by the next set of measures against them.

The Assembly withdrew all recognition of Catholicism as the religion of the State; monastic vows were abolished, and orders and congregations suppressed; the ecclesiastical divisions were made to coincide with the civil divisions, a bishop being allotted to each department. What was a more important revolution than all, bishops and incumbents were henceforth to be appointed by popular election. The Assembly, who had always the institutions of our own country before them, meant to introduce into France the system of the Church of England, that was even then an anachronism in the land of its birth; much more was such a system an anachronism, after belief had been sapped by a Voltaire and an Encyclopaedia. The clergy both showed and excited a mutinous spirit. The Assembly, by way of retort, decreed that all ecclesiastics should take the oath of allegiance to the civil constitution of the clergy, on pain of forfeiture of their benefices. Five-sixths of the clergy refused, and the result was an outbreak of religious fury in the great towns of the south and elsewhere, that recalled the violence of the sixteenth century and the Reformation.

Thus when the Constituent Assembly ceased from its labours, the popular party had to face the mocking and defiant privileged classes; the magistracy, whose craft and calling were gone; and the clergy and as many of the flocks as shared the vindictiveness of their pastors. Immense material

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improvements had been made, but who was to guard them against all these powerful and exasperated bands? No chamber could execute so portentous an office, least of all a chamber that was bound to work in accord with a king, who at the very moment when he was swearing fidelity to the new order of things, was sending entreaties to the King of Prussia and to the Emperor, his brother-in-law, to overthrow the new order and bring back the old. If the Revolution had achieved priceless gains for France, they could only be preserved on condition that public action was directed by those who valued these gains for themselves and for their children above all things else—above the monarchy, above the constitution, above peace, above their own sorry lives. There was only one party who showed this passionate devotion, this fanatical resolution not to suffer to be undone the work that had been done, and never to allow France to sink back from exalted national life into the lethargy of national death. That party was the Jacobins, and, above all, the austere and rigorous Jacobins of Paris. On their ascendancy depended the triumph of the Revolution, and on the triumph of the Revolution depended the salvation of France. Their ascendancy meant a Jacobin dictatorship, and against this, as against dictatorship in all its forms, many things have been said, and truly said. But the one most important thing that can be said about Jacobin dictatorship is that, in spite of all the dolorous mishaps and hateful misdeeds that marked its course, it was still the only instrument capable of concentrating and utilising the dispersed social energy of the French people.

The great popular club of Paris was the centre of all those who looked at events in this spirit. The Legislative Assembly, the successor of the Constituent, met in the month of October 1791.

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Like its predecessor, the Legislative contained a host of excellent and patriotic men, and they at once applied themselves to the all-important task, which the Constituent had left so incomplete, of finally breaking down the old feudal rights. The most important group in the new chamber were the deputies from the Gironde. Events soon revealed violent dissents between Girondins and Jacobins, but, for some months after the meeting of the Legislative, Girondins and Jacobins represented together in unbroken unity the great popular party. From this time until the fall of the monarchy, the whole of this popular party in all its branches found their rallying-place, not in the Assembly, but in the Jacobin Club; and the ascendancy of the Jacobin Club embodied the dictatorship of Paris. It was only from Paris that the whole circle of events could be commanded. When the peasants had got what they wanted, that is to say the emancipation of the land, they were ready to think that the Revolution was in safety and at an end. They were in no position to see the enmity of the exiles, the dangerous selfishness of Austria and Prussia, the disloyal machinations of the court, the reactionary sentiment of La Vendée, the absolute unworkableness of the new constitution. Arthur Young, in the height of the agitations of the Constituent Assembly, found himself at Moulins, the capital of the Bourbonnais, and on the great post-road to Italy. He went to the best coffee-house in the town, and found as many as twenty tables spread for company, but as for a newspaper, he says he might as well have asked for an elephant. In the capital of a great province, the seat of an Intendant, at a moment like that, with a National Assembly voting a revolution, and not a newspaper to tell the people whether Lafayette, Mirabeau, or Louis XVI. were on the throne! Could such a people as this, he

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cries, ever have made a revolution or become free? "Never in a thousand centuries: the enlightened mob of Paris have done the whole." And that was the plain truth. What was involved in such a truth, we shall see presently.

Robespierre had now risen to be one of the foremost men in France. To borrow the figure of an older chief of French faction, from trifling among the violins in the orchestra, he had ascended to the stage itself, and had a right to perform leading parts. Disqualified for sitting in the Assembly, he wielded greater power than ever in the Club. The Constituent had been full of his enemies. "Alone with my own soul," he once cried to the Jacobins, "how could I have borne struggles that were beyond any human strength, if I had not raised my spirit to God?" This isolation marked him with a kind of theocratic distinction. These communings with the unseen powers gave a certain indefinable prerogative to a man, even among the children of the century of Voltaire. Condorcet, the youngest of the intimates and disciples of Voltaire, of D'Alembert, of Turgot, was the first to sound bitter warning that Robespierre was at heart a priest. The suggestion was more than a gibe. By and by, from mere priest he developed into the deadlier carnivore, the Inquisitor.

The absence of advantages of bodily presence has never been fatal to the pretensions of the pontiff. Robespierre was only a couple of inches above five feet in height, but the Grand Monarch himself was hardly more. His eyes were small and weak, and he usually wore spectacles; his face was pitted by the marks of smallpox; his complexion was dull and sometimes livid; the tones of his voice were dry and shrill; and he spoke with the vulgar accent of his province. Such is the accepted tradition, and there is no reason to dissent from it. It is fair, however, to

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remember that Robespierre's enemies had command of his historic reputation at its source. So Robespierre's voice and person may have been maligned, just as Aristophanes may have been a calumniator when he accused Cleon of having an intolerably loud voice and smelling of the tan-yard. What is certain is that Robespierre was a master of effective oratory adapted for a violent popular audience, to impress, to persuade, and to command. The Convention would have yawned, if it had not trembled under him, but the Jacobin Club never found him tedious. Robespierre's style had no richness either of feeling or of phrase; no fervid originality, no happy violences. If we turn from a page of Rousseau to a page of Robespierre, we feel that the disciple has none of the sonorous thrill of the master; the ardour has become metallic; the long-drawn plangency is parodied by shrill notes of splenetic complaint. Robespierre could not rival the vivid and highly-coloured declamation of Vergniaud; his speeches were never heated with the ardent passion that poured like a torrent of fire through some of the orations of Isnard; nor, above all, had he any mastery of that dialect of the Titans, by which Danton convulsed an audience with fear, with amazement, or with the spirit of defiant endeavour. The absence of these intenser qualities did not make Robespierre's speeches less effective for their own purpose. On the contrary, when the air has become torrid, and passionate utterance is cheap, then severity in form is very likely to pass for sense in substance. That Robespierre had decent fluency, copiousness, and finish, need hardly be said. He more than once showed himself ready with a forcible reply on critical occasions: this only makes him an illustration the more of the good oratorical rule, that he is most likely to come well out of the emergency of an improvisation,

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who is usually most careful to prepare. Robespierre was as solicitous about the correctness of his speech as he was about the neatness of his clothes; he no more grudged the pains given to the polishing of his discourses than he grudged the time given every day to the powdering of his hair.

Nothing was more remarkable than his dexterity in presenting his case. James Mill used to point out to his son among other skilful arts of Demosthenes, these two: first, that he said everything important to his purpose at the exact moment when he had brought the minds of his hearers into the state most fitted to receive it; second, that he insinuated gradually and indirectly into their minds ideas that would have roused opposition if they had been expressed more directly. Mill once called the attention of the present writer to exactly the same kind of rhetorical skill in the speeches of Robespierre. The reader may do well to turn, for excellent specimens of this, to the speech of January 11, 1792, against the war, or that of May 1794 against atheism. The logic is stringent, but the premisses are arbitrary. Robespierre is as one who should iterate indisputable propositions of abstract geometry and mechanics, while men are craving an architect who shall bridge the gulf of waters. Exuberance of high words no longer conceals the sterility of his ideas and the shallowness of his method. We should say of his speeches, as of so much of the speaking and writing of the time, that it is transparent and smooth, but there is none of that quality which the critics of painting call Texture.

His listeners, however, in the old refectory of the Convent of the Jacobins took little heed of these things; the matter was too absorbing, the issue too vital. A hundred years before, the hunted Covenanters of the Western Lowlands, with Claverhouse's dragoons a few miles off, exulted in the

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endless exhortations and expositions of their hill preachers: they relished nothing so keenly as three hours of Mucklewrath, followed by three hours more of Peter Poundtext. We now find the jargon of the Mucklewraths and the Poundtexts of the Solemn League and Covenant, dead as it is, still not devoid of the picturesque and the impressive. We cannot say the same of the great preacher of the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

We have still to mark the trait that above everything else gave to Robespierre the trust and confidence of Paris. As men listened to him, they had full faith in the integrity of the speaker. And Robespierre in one way deserved this confidence. He was possessor of a conscience. When the strain of circumstance in the last few months of his life pressed him towards wrong, at least before doing wrong he was forced to lie to his own conscience. This is a kind of honesty, as the world goes. In the Salon of 1791 an artist exhibited Robespierre's portrait, simply inscribing it, *The Incorruptible.* Throngs passed before it every day, and ratified the honourable designation by eager murmurs of approval. The democratic journals were loud in panegyric on the unsleeping sentinel of liberty. They loved to speak of him as the modern Fabricius, and delighted to recall the words of Pyrrhus, that it is easier to turn the sun from its course, than to turn Fabricius from the path of honour. Patriotic parents eagerly besought him to be sponsor for their children. Ladies of wealth, including at least one countrywoman of our own, vainly entreated him to accept their purses.

Robespierre's life was frugal and simple, as must always be seemly in the spokesman of the dumb multitude whose lives are hard. He had a single room in the house of Duplay, at the extreme west end of the long rue Saint Honoré, half a mile

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from the Jacobin Club, and less than that from the Riding School of the Tuileries, where the Constituent and Legislative Assemblies held session. His room, which served him for bed-chamber as well as for the uses of the day, was scantily furnished, and he shared the homely fare of his host. Duplay was a carpenter, a sworn follower of Robespierre, and the whole family cherished their guest as if he had been a son and a brother. Between him and the eldest daughter of the house a more tender sentiment grew up, and Robespierre looked forward to the joys of the hearth, so soon as his country should be delivered from the oppressors without and the traitors within.

Eagerly as Robespierre delighted in his popularity, he intended it to be a force and not a decoration. An occasion of testing his influence arose in the winter of 1791. The situation had become more and more difficult. The court was more disloyal and more perverse, as its hopes became fainter that the nightmare would come to an end. In the summer of 1791, the German Emperor, the King of Prussia, and minor champions of retrograde causes issued the famous Declaration of Pilnitz. The menace of intervention was the one element needed to make the position of the monarchy desperate. It roused France to fever heat. For along with the foreign kings were the French princes of the blood and the French nobles. In the spring of 1792, the Assembly forced the king to declare war against Austria. Robespierre, in spite of the strong tide of warlike feeling, led the Jacobin opposition to the war. This is one of the most sagacious acts of his career, for the hazards of the conflict were terrible. If the foreigners and the emigrant nobles were victorious, all that the Revolution had won would be instantly and irretrievably lost. If, on the other hand, the French armies were victorious, one of two

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disasters might follow. Either the troops might become a weapon in the hands of the court and the reactionary party, for the suppression of all the progressive parties alike; or else their general might make himself supreme. Robespierre divined, what the Girondins did not, that Narbonne and the court, in accepting the cry for war, were secretly designing, first, to crush the faction of emigrant nobles, then to make the king popular at home, and thus finally to construct a strong royalist army. The Constitutional party in the Legislative Assembly had the same ideas as Narbonne. The Girondins sought war; first, from a genuine, if not a profoundly wise, enthusiasm for liberty, which they would fain have spread all over the world; and next, because they thought that war would increase their popularity, and give them decisive control of the situation.

The first effect of the war declared in April 1792 was to shake down the throne. Operations had no sooner begun than the king became an object of bitter and amply warranted suspicion. Neither the leaders nor the people had forgotten his flight a year before, to place himself at the head of the foreign invaders, nor the letter that he had left behind him for the National Assembly, protesting against all that had been done. They were again reminded of what short shrift they might expect if the king's friends should come back. The Duke of Brunswick at the head of the foreign army set out on his march, and issued his famous proclamation to the inhabitants of France. He demanded immediate and unconditional submission; he threatened with fire and sword every town, village, or hamlet, that should dare to defend itself; and finally, he swore that if the smallest violence or insult were done to the king or his family, the city of Paris should be handed over to military execution and absolute destruction.

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This insensate document bears marks in every line of the implacable hate and burning thirst for revenge that consumed the aristocratic refugees. Only civil war can awaken such rage as Brunswick's manifesto betrayed. It was drawn up by the French nobles at Coblenz. He merely signed it. The reply to it was the memorable insurrection of the Tenth of August 1792. The king was thrown into prison, and the Legislative Assembly made way for the National Convention.

Robespierre's part in the great rising of August was only secondary. A few weeks before he had started a journal and written articles in a constitutional sense. M. d'Héricault believes a story that Robespierre's aim in this had been to have himself accepted as tutor for the young dauphin. It is impossible to prove a negative, but we find great difficulty in believing that such a post could ever have been an object of Robespierre's ambition. Now and always he showed a rather singular preference for the substance of power over its glitter. He was vain and an egoist, but in spite of this, and in spite of his passion for empty phrases, he was not without a sense of reality.

The insurrection of the Tenth of August, however, was the idea, not of Robespierre, but of a more commanding personage, who now became one of the foremost of the Jacobin chiefs. De Maistre, that ardent champion of reaction, found a striking argument for the presence of the divine hand in the Revolution, in the intense mediocrity of the revolutionary leaders. How could such men, he asked, have achieved such results, if they had not been instruments of the directing will of heaven? Danton at any rate is above this caustic criticism. Danton was of the Herculean type of a Luther, though without Luther's deep vision of spiritual things; or a Chatham, though without Chatham's august majesty of life; or a Cromwell, though

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without Cromwell's unshaken steadfastness of patriotic purpose. His visage and port seemed to declare his character: dark overhanging brows; eyes that had the gleam of lightning; a savage mouth; an immense head; the voice of a Stentor. Madame Roland pictured him as a fiercer Sardanapalus. Artists called him Jove the Thunderer. His enemies saw in him the Satan of the *Paradise Lost*. He was no moral regenerator; the difference between him and Robespierre is typified in Danton's version of an old saying, that he who hates vices hates men. He was not free from the careless life-contemning desperation, that sometimes belongs to forcible natures. He was too heedless of his good name, and too blind to the truth that, though right and wrong may be near neighbours, yet the line that separates them is of an awful sacredness. If Robespierre passed for a hypocrite by reason of his scruple, Danton seemed a desperado by his airs of "immoral thoughtlessness." But the world forgives much to a royal size, and Danton was one of the men who strike deep notes. He had the largeness of motive, fulness of nature, and capaciousness of mind that will always redeem a multitude of infirmities.

Though the author of some of the most tremendous and far-sounding phrases of an epoch that was only too rich in them, yet phrases had no empire over him; he was their master, not their dupe. Of all the men who succeeded Mirabeau as directors of the unchained forces, we feel that Danton alone was in his true element. Action, which poisoned the blood of such men as Robespierre, and drove such men as Vergniaud out of their senses with exaltation, was to Danton his native sphere. When France was for a moment discouraged, it was he who nerved her to new effort by the electrifying cry, "*We must dare,*

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and again dare, and without end dare!" If his rivals or his friends seemed too intent on trifles, too apt to confound side-issues with the central aim of the battle, Danton was ever ready to urge them to take a juster measure: "*When the edifice is all ablaze, I take little heed of the knaves who are pilfering the household goods; I rush to put out the flames.*" When base egoism was compromising a cause more priceless than the personality of any man, it was Danton who made them ashamed by the inspiring exclamation, "*Let my name be blotted out and my memory perish, if only France may be free.*" The Girondins denounced the popular clubs of Paris as hives of lawlessness and outrage. Danton warned them that it were wiser to go to these seething societies and to guide them, than to waste breath in futile denunciation. "A nation in revolution," he cried to them, in a superb figure, "is like the bronze boiling and foaming and purifying itself in the cauldron. Not yet is the statue of Liberty cast. Fiercely boils the metal; have an eye on the furnace, or the flame will surely scorch you." If there was murderous work below the hatches, that was all the more reason why the steersman should keep his hand strong and ready on the wheel, with an eye quick for each new drift in the hurricane, and each new set in the raging currents. This is ever the figure under which one conceives Danton — a Titanic shape doing battle with the fury of the seas, yielding while flood upon flood sweeps wildly over him, and then with undaunted front once more surveying the waste of waters, and striving with dexterous energy to force the straining vessel over the waters of the bar.

Lafayette had called the huge giant of popular force from its squalid lurking-places, and now he trembled before its presence, and fled from it shrieking, with averted hands. Marat thrust

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swords into the giant's half-unwilling grasp, and plied him with bloody incitement to slay hip and thigh, and so filled the land with a horror that has not faded from out of men's minds to this day. Danton instantly discerned that the problem was to preserve revolutionary energy, and still to persuade the insurgent forces to retire once more within their boundaries. Robespierre discerned this too, but he was paralysed and bewildered by his own principles, as the convinced doctrinaire is so apt to be amid the perplexities of practice. The teaching of Rousseau was ever pouring like thin smoke among his ideas, and clouding his view of actual conditions. The Tenth of August produced a considerable change in Robespierre's point of view. It awoke him to the steepness of the slope down which the revolutionary car was rushing headlong. His faith in the infallibility of the people suffered no shock, but he was in a moment alive to the need of walking warily, and his whole march from now until the end, twenty-three months later, became timorous, cunning, and oblique.

The enthusiastic pedant, with his narrow understanding, his thin purism, and his idyllic sentimentalism, found that the summoning archangel of his paradise proved to be a ruffian with a pike. The shock must have been tremendous. Robespierre did not quail nor retreat; he only revised his notion of the situation. A curious interview once took place between him and Marat. Robespierre began by assuring the Friend of the People that he quite understood the atrocious demands for blood with which the columns of Marat's newspaper were filled, to be merely useful exaggerations of his real designs. Marat repelled the disparaging imputation of clemency and common sense, and talked in his familiar vein of poniarding brigands, burning despots alive in their palaces,

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and impaling the traitors of the Assembly on their own benches. "Robespierre," says Marat, "listened to me with affright; he turned pale and said nothing. The interview confirmed the opinion I had always had of him, that he united the integrity of a thoroughly honest man and the zeal of a good patriot, with the enlightenment of a wise senator, but that he was without either the views or the audacity of a real statesman." The picture is instructive, for it shows us Robespierre's invariable habit of leaving violence and iniquity unrebuked; of conciliating the practitioners of violence and iniquity; and of contenting himself with an inward hope of turning the world into a right course by fine words. He had no audacity in Marat's sense, but he was no coward. He knew, as all these men knew, that almost from hour to hour he carried his life in his hand, yet he declined to seek shelter in the obscurity that saved such men as Sieyès. But if he had courage, he had not the initiative of a man of action. He invented none of the ideas or methods of the Revolution, not even the Reign of Terror, but he was very dexterous in accepting or appropriating what more audacious spirits than himself had devised and enforced. The pedant, cursed with the ambition to be a ruler of men, is a curious study. He would be glad not to go too far, and yet his chief dread is lest he be left behind. His consciousness of pure aims allows him to become an accomplice in the worst crimes. Suspecting himself at bottom to be a theorist, he hastens to clear his character as man of practice by conniving at an enormity. Thus, in September 1792, a band of miscreants committed the atrocious massacres in the prisons of Paris. Robespierre, though the best evidence goes to show that he not only did not abet the prison murders, but in his heart deplored them, yet after the event did not scruple

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to justify what had been done. This was the beginning of a long course of compliance with sanguinary misdeeds, for which Robespierre has been as hotly execrated as if he prompted them. We are not measuring the relative degrees of guilt that attached to mere compliance on the one hand, and cruel origination on the other. But his position in the Revolution is not rightly understood, unless we recognise him as being in almost every case an accessory after the fact.

Between the fall of Louis in 1792 and the fall of Robespierre in 1794, France was the scene of two main series of events. One set comprises the repulse of the invaders, the suppression of an extensive civil war, and the attempted reconstruction of a social framework. The other comprises the rapid phases of an internecine struggle of violent and short-lived factions. By an unhappy fatality, due partly to anti-democratic prejudice, and partly to men's unfailing passion for melodrama, the Reign of Terror has been popularly taken for the central and most important part of the revolutionary epic. This is nearly as absurd as it would be to make Gustave Flourens' manifestation of the Fifth of October, or the rising of the Thirty-first of October, the most prominent features in a history of the war of French defence in a later day. In truth, the Terror was a mere episode; and just as the rising of October 1870 was due to Marshal Bazaine's capitulation at Metz, it is easy to see that, with one exception, every violent movement in Paris, from 1792 to 1794, was due to menace or disaster on the frontier. Every one of the famous days of Paris was an answer to some enemy without. The storm of the Tuileries on the Tenth of August, as we have already said, was the response to Brunswick's proclamation. The bloody days of

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September were the reaction of panic at the capture of Longwy and Verdun by the Prussians. The surrender of Cambrai provoked the execution of Marie Antoinette. The defeat of Aix-la-Chapelle produced the abortive insurrection of the Tenth of March; and the treason of Dumouriez, the reverses of Custine, and the rebellion in La Vendée, produced the effectual insurrection of the Thirty-first of May 1793. The last of these two risings of Paris, headed by the Commune, against the Convention that was until then controlled by the Girondins, at length gave the government of France and the defence of the Revolution definitely over to the Jacobins. Their patriotic dictatorship lasted unbroken for a short period of ten months, and then the great party broke up into factions. The splendid triumphs of the dictatorship have been, in England at any rate, too usually forgotten, and only the crimes of the factions remembered. Robespierre's history belongs to the less important battle.

II

The Girondins were driven out of the Convention by the insurgent Parisians at the beginning of June 1793. The movement may be roughly compared to that of the Independents in our own Rebellion, when the army compelled the withdrawal of eleven of the Presbyterian leaders from the parliament; or it may recall Pride's memorable Purge of the same famous assembly. Both cases illustrate the common truth that large deliberative bodies, be they never so excellent for purposes of legislation, and even for a general control of the executive government in ordinary times, are found to be essentially unfit for directing a military crisis. If there are any historic examples that at first seem to contradict such a proposition, it will be found that the bodies in question were close

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aristocracies, like the Great Council of Venice, or the Senate of Rome in the strong days of the Commonwealth; they were never the creatures of popular election, with varying aims and a diversified political spirit. Modern publicists have substituted the divine right of assemblies for the old divine right of monarchies. Those who condone the violence done to the king on the Tenth of August, and even acquiesce in his execution five months afterwards, are relentless against the violence done to the Convention on the Thirty-first of May. It is hard to follow this transfer of the superstition of sacrosanctity from a king to a chamber. No doubt, the sooner a nation acquires a settled government, the better for it, provided the government be efficient. But if it be not efficient, the mischief of actively suppressing it may well be fully outweighed by the mischief of retaining it. We have no wish to smooth over the perversities of a revolutionary time; they cost a nation very dear; but if all the elements of the state are in furious convulsion and uncontrollable effervescence, then it is childish to measure the march of events by the standard of happier days of social peace and political order. The prospect before France at the violent close of Girondin supremacy was as formidable as any nation has ever yet had to confront in the history of the world. Rome was not more critically placed when the defeat of Varro on the plain of Cannae had broken up her alliances and ruined her army. The brave patriots of the Netherlands had no gloomier outlook at that moment when the Prince of Orange had left them, and Alva had been appointed to bring them back by rapine, conflagration, and murder, under the loathed yoke of the Spanish tyrant.

Let us realise the conditions Robespierre and Danton and the other Jacobin leaders had now

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to face. In the north-west one division of the fugitive Girondins was forming an army at Caen; in the south-west another division was doing the same at Bordeaux. Marseilles and Lyons were rallying all the disaffected and reactionary elements in the south-east. La Vendée had flamed out in wild rebellion for Church and King. The strong places on the north frontier, and the strong places on the east, were in the hands of the foreign enemy. The fate of the Revolution lay in the issue of a struggle between Paris, with less than a score of departments on her side, and all the rest of France and the whole European coalition marshalled against her. And even this was not the worst. In Paris itself a very considerable proportion of its half-million of inhabitants were disaffected to the revolutionary cause. Reactionary historians dwell on the fact that such risings as that of the Tenth of August were devised by no more than half of the sections into which Paris was divided. It was common, they say, for half a dozen individuals to take upon themselves to represent the fourteen or fifteen hundred other members of a section. But what better proof can we have that if France was to be delivered from restored feudalism and foreign spoliation, the momentous task must be performed by those who had sense to discern the awful peril, and energy to encounter it?

The Girondins had made their incapacity plain. The execution of the king had filled them with alarm, and with hatred against the ruder and more robust party who had forced that startling act of vengeance upon them. Puny social disgusts prevented them from co-operating with Danton or with Robespierre. Prussia and Austria were not more redoubtable or more hateful to them than was Paris, and they wasted, in futile recriminations about the September massacres or the alleged peculations of municipal officers, the

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time and the energy that should have been devoted without let or interruption to the settlement of the administration and the repulse of the foe. It is impossible to think of such fine characters as Vergniaud or Madame Roland without admiration, or of their untimely fate without pity. But the deliverance of a people beset by strong and implacable enemies could not wait on good manners and fastidious sentiments, when these comely things were in company with the most stupendous want of foresight ever shown by a political party. How can we measure the folly of men who so missed the conditions of the problem as to cry out in the Convention itself, almost within earshot of the Jacobin Club, that if any insult were offered to the national representation, the departments would rise, "Paris would be annihilated; and men would come to search on the banks of the Seine whether such a city had ever existed!"? It was to no purpose that Danton urgently rebuked the senseless animosity with which the Right poured incessant malediction on the Left, and the wild shrieking hate with which the Left retaliated on the Right. The battle was to the death, and it was the Girondins who first menaced their political foes with vengeance and the guillotine. As it happened, the treason of Dumouriez and their own ineptitude destroyed them before revenge was within reach. Such a consummation was fortunate for their country. It was the Girondins whose want of union and energy had by the middle of 1793 brought France to distraction and imminent ruin. It was a short year of Jacobin government that by the summer of 1794 had welded the nation together again, and finally conquered the invasion. The city of the Seine had once more shown itself what it had been for nine centuries, ever since the days of Odo, Count of Paris and first King of the French, not merely

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a capital, but France itself, "its living heart and surest bulwark."

The immediate instrument of so rapid and extraordinary an achievement was the Committee of Public Safety. The French have never shown their quick genius for organisation with more triumphant vigour. While the Girondins were still powerful, nine members of the Convention had been constituted an executive committee, April 6, 1793. They were in fact a kind of permanent Cabinet, with practical irresponsibility. In the summer of 1793 the number was increased from nine to twelve, and these twelve were the centre of the revolutionary government. They fell into three groups. First, there were the scientific or practical administrators, of whom the most eminent was Carnot. Next came the directors of internal policy, the pure revolutionists, headed by Billaud-Varennes. Finally, there was a trio whose business it was to translate action into the phrases of revolutionary policy. This famous group was Robespierre, Couthon, and Saint-Just.

Besides the Committee of Public Safety there was another chief governmental committee, that of General Security. Its functions were mainly connected with the police, the arrests, and the prisons, but in all serious affairs the two Committees deliberated in common. There were also fourteen other groups of various size, taken from the Convention; they applied themselves with admirable zeal, and usually not with more zeal than skill, to schemes of public instruction, of finance, of legislation, of the administration of justice, and a host of other civil reforms, of all of which Napoleon was by and by to reap the credit. These bodies completed the civil revolution, which the Constituent and the Legislative Assemblies had left so mischievously incomplete that, as soon as ever the Convention had assembled, it was besieged

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by a host of petitioners praying them to explain and to pursue the abolition of the old feudal rights. Everything had still been left uncertain in men's minds, even upon that greatest of all the revolutionary questions. The feudal division of the committee of general legislation had in this eleventh hour to decide innumerable issues, from those of the widest practical importance, down to the prayer of a remote commune to be relieved from the charge of maintaining a certain mortuary lamp that had been a matter of seignorial obligation. The work done by the radical jurisconsults was never undone. It was the great and durable reward of the struggle. And we have to remember that these industrious and efficient bodies, as well as all other public bodies and functionaries whatever, were placed by the definite revolutionary constitution of 1793 under the direct orders of the Committee of Public Safety.

It is hardly possible even now for any one who exults in the memory of the great deliverance of a brilliant and sociable people, to stand unmoved before the walls of the palace which Philibert Delorme reared for Catherine de' Medici, and which was thrown into ruin by the madness of a band of desperate men in 1871. Louis had walked forth from the Tuileries on the fatal morning of the Tenth of August, holding his children by the hand, and lightly noticing, as he traversed the gardens, how early that year the leaves were falling. He had by this time followed the fallen leaves into nothingness. The palace of the kings was now styled the Palace of the Nation, and the new Republic carried on its work surrounded by the outward associations of the old monarchy. The Convention after the spring of 1793 held its sittings in what had formerly been the palace theatre. Fierce men from the Faubourgs of St. Antoine

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and St. Marceau, and fiercer women from the markets, shouted savage applause or menace from galleries where not so long ago the Italian buffoons had amused the perpetual leisure of the finest ladies and proudest grandees of France. The Committee of General Security occupied the Pavillon de Marsan, looking over a dingy space that the conqueror at Rivoli afterwards made the most dazzling street in Europe. The Committee of Public Safety sat in the Pavillon de Flore, at the opposite end of the Tuileries on the river bank. The approaches were protected by guns and by a bodyguard, while inside there flitted to and fro a cloud of familiars, who have been compared by the enemies of the Great Committee to the mutes of the court of the Grand Turk. Any one who had business with this awful body had to grope his way along gloomy corridors, that were dimly lighted by a single lamp at either end. The room in which the Committee sat round a table of green cloth, was incongruously gay with the clocks, the bronzes, the mirrors, the tapestries, of the ruined court. The members met at eight in the morning and worked until one; from one to four they attended the sitting of the Convention. In the evening they met again, and usually sat until night was far advanced. It was no wonder if their hue became cadaverous, their eyes hollow and bloodshot, their brows stern, their glance preoccupied and sinister. Between ten and eleven every evening a sombre piece of business was transacted, that has half effaced in the memory of posterity all the heroic industry of the rest of the twenty-four hours. It was then that Fouquier-Tinville, the public prosecutor, brought an account of his day's labour; how the Revolutionary Tribunal was working, how many had been convicted and how many acquitted, how large or how small had been the batch of the guillotine since the previous

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night. Across the breadth of the gardens, beyond their trees and fountains, stood the Monster itself, with its cruel symmetry, its colour as of the blood of the dead, its unheeding knife, neutral as the Fates.

Robespierre has been held responsible for all the violences of the revolutionary government, and his position on the Committee appeared to be exceedingly strong. It was, however, for a long time much less strong in reality than it seemed: all depended upon successfully playing off one force against another, and at the same time maintaining himself at the centre of the see-saw. Robespierre was the literary and rhetorical member of the band; he was the author of the strident manifestoes in which Europe listened with exasperation to the audacious hopes and unfaltering purpose of the new France. This had the effect of investing him in the eyes of foreign nations with supreme and undisputed authority over the government. The truth is, that Robespierre was both disliked and despised by his colleagues. They thought of him as a mere maker of useful phrases; he in turn secretly looked down upon them, as the man who has a doctrine and a system in his head always looks down upon the man who lives from hand to mouth. If the Committee had been in the place of a government that has no opposition to fear, Robespierre would have been one of its least powerful members. But although the government was strong, there were at least three potent elements of opposition even within the ranks of the dominant revolutionary party itself.

Three bodies in Paris were, each of them, the centre of an influence that might at any moment become the triumphant rival of the Committee of Public Safety. These bodies were the Convention, the Commune of Paris, and the Jacobin Club. The jealousy thus existing outside the Committee

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would have made any failure instantly destructive. At one moment, at the end of 1793, it was only the surrender of Toulon that saved the Committee from a hostile motion in the Convention, and such a motion would have sent half of them to the guillotine. They were reviled by the extreme party who ruled at the Town Hall for not carrying the policy of extermination far enough. They were reproached by Danton and his powerful section for carrying that policy too far. They were discredited by the small band of intriguers, like Bazire, who identified government with peculation. Finally, they were haunted by the shadow of a fear, which events were by and by to prove only too substantial, lest one of their military agents on the frontier should make himself their master. The key to the struggle of the factions between the winter of 1793 and the revolution of the summer of 1794 is the vigorous resolve of the governing Committees not to part with power. The drama is one of the most exciting in the history of faction; it abounds in rapid turns and unexpected shifts upon which the student may spend many a day and many a night, and after all he is forced to leave off in despair of threading an accurate way through the labyrinth of passion and intrigue. The broad traits of the situation, however, are tolerably simple. The difficulty was to find a principle of government that the people could be induced to accept. "The rights of men and the new principles of liberty and equality," Burke said, "were very unhandy instruments for those who wished to establish a system of tranquillity and order. The factions," he added with fierce sarcasm, "were to accomplish the purposes of order, morality, and submission to the laws, from the principles of atheism, profligacy, and sedition. They endeavoured to establish distinctions, by the belief of which they hoped to

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keep the spirit of murder safely bottled up and sealed for their own purposes, without endangering themselves by the fumes of the poison which they prepared for their enemies." This ferocious and passionate version is substantially no unreal account of the position.

Upon one point all parties agreed, and that was the necessity of founding the government upon force, and force naturally meant Terror. Their plea was that of Dido to Ilioneus and the storm-beaten sons of Dardanus, when they complained that her people had drawn the sword upon them, and barbarously denied the hospitality of the sandy shore :

> Res dura et regni novitas me talia cogunt
> Moliri.

And the pithy chapter in Machiavelli's *Prince* that treats of cruelty and clemency, and whether it be better to be loved or feared, anticipates the defence of the Terrorists, in the maxim that for a new prince it is impossible to avoid the name of cruel, because all new states abound in many perils. The difference arose on the question when Terror should be considered to have done as much of its work as it could be expected to do. This difference again was connected with difference of conception as to the type of the society that was ultimately to emerge from the existing chaos. Billaud-Varennes, the guiding spirit of the Committees, was without any conception of this kind. He was a man of force pure and simple. Danton was equally untouched by dreams of social transformation ; his philosophy, so far as he had one, was, in spite of one or two inconsistent utterances, materialistic : and materialism, when it takes root in a sane, perspicacious, and indulgent character, as in the case of Danton, and, to take a better-known example, in the case of Jefferson, usually

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leads to a sound and positive theory of politics; chimeras have no place in it, though a rational social hope has the first place of all. Neither Danton nor Billaud expected a millennium; their only aim was to shape France into a coherent political personality, and the war between them turned upon the policy of prolonging the Terror after the frontiers had been saved and the risings in the provinces put down. There were, however, two parties who took the literature of the century in earnest; they thought that the hour had struck for translating, one of them, the sentimentalism of Rousseau, the other of them, the rationalism of Voltaire and Diderot, into terms of politics that should form the basis of a new social life. The strife between the faction of Robespierre and the faction of Chaumette was the reproduction, under the shadow of the guillotine, of the deep literary strife of a quarter of a century before, between Jean Jacques and the writers whom he contemptuously styled Holbachians. The battle of the books had become a battle between bands of infuriated men. The struggle between Hébert and Chaumette and the Common Council of Paris on the one part, and the Committee and Robespierre on the other, was the concrete form of the deepest controversy that lies before modern society. Can the social union subsist without a belief in a Supreme Being? Chaumette answered Yes, and Robespierre cried No. Robespierre followed Rousseau in thinking that any one who should refuse to recognise the existence of a God, should be exiled as a monster devoid of the faculties of virtue and sociability. Chaumette followed Diderot, and Diderot told Samuel Romilly in 1783 that belief in God, as well as submission to kings, would be at an end all over the world in a very few years. The theists and the atheists, Chaumette and Robespierre, each of them accepted the doctrine that it was in the

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power of the armed legislator to impose any belief and any rites he pleased upon the country at his feet. Theism or atheism depended, as they thought, on the issue of the war for authority between the Hébertists in the Common Council of Paris, and the Committee of Public Safety. That was the religious side of the attitude of the government to the opposition, and it is the side that possesses most historic interest. Billaud cared very little for religion in any way; his quarrel with the Commune and with Hébert was political. What Robespierre's drift appears to have been, was to use the political animosity of the Committee as a means of striking foes against whom his own animosity was both political and religious.

It would doubtless show a very dull apprehension of the violence and confusion of the time to suppose that even Robespierre, with all his love for concise theories, was accustomed to state his aim to himself with the definite neatness in which it appears when reduced to literary statement. Pedant as he was, he was yet enough of a politician to see the practical urgency of restoring material order, whatever spiritual belief or disbelief might accompany it. The prospect of a rallying point for material order was incessantly changing, and Robespierre turned to different quarters in search of it almost from week to week. He was only able to exert a certain limited authority over his colleagues in the government, by virtue of his influence over the various sections of possible opposition, and this was a moral, and not an official, influence. It was acquired not by marked practical gifts, for in truth Robespierre did not possess them, but by his good character, by his rhetoric, and by the skill with which he kept himself prominently before the public eye. The effective seat of his power, notwithstanding many limits and incessant variations, was the Jacobin Club.

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There a speech from him threw his listeners into ecstasies that have been disrespectfully compared to the paroxysms of Jansenist convulsionaries, or the hysterics of Methodist negroes on a cotton plantation. We naturally think of those grave men who a few years before had founded the Republic in America. Jefferson served with Washington in the Virginian legislature and with Franklin in Congress, and he afterwards said that he never heard either of them speak ten minutes at a time; while John Adams declared that he never heard Jefferson utter three sentences together. Of Robespierre it is stated on good authority that for eighteen months there was not a single evening on which he did not make to the assembled Jacobins at least one speech, and that never a short one.

Strange as it may seem, Robespierre's credit with this grim assemblage was due to his truly Philistine respectability and his literary faculty. He figured as the philosopher and bookman of the party: the most iconoclastic politicians are usually willing to respect the scholar, provided they are sure of his being on their side. Robespierre had from the first discountenanced the fantastic caprices of some too excitable allies. He distrusted the noisy patriots of the middle class, who curried favour with the crowd by clothing themselves in coarse garments, clutching a pike, and donning the famous cap of red woollen that had been the emblem of the emancipation of a slave in ancient Rome. One night at the Jacobin Club, Robespierre mounted the tribune, dressed with his usual elaborate neatness, and still wearing powder in his hair. An onlooker unceremoniously planted on the orator's head the red cap demanded by revolutionary etiquette. Robespierre threw the sacred symbol on the ground with a severe air, and then proceeded with a discourse of much

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austerity. Not that he was averse to a certain seemly decoration, or to the embodiment of revolutionary sentiment by means of a symbolism that strikes our cooler imagination as puerile. He was as ready as others to use the arts of the theatre for the liturgy of patriots. One of the most touching of all the minor dramatic incidents of the Revolution was the death of Barra. This was a child of thirteen who enrolled himself as a drummer, and marched with the Blues to suppress the rebel Whites in La Vendée. One day he advanced too close to the enemy's post, intrepidly beating the charge. He was surrounded, but the peasant soldiers were loth to strike. "Cry *Long live the King!*" they shouted, "or else death!" "Long live the Republic!" was the poor little hero's answer, as a ball pierced his heart. Robespierre described the incident to the Convention, and amid prodigious enthusiasm demanded that the body of the young martyr of liberty should be transported to the Pantheon with special pomp, and that David, the artist of the Revolution, should be charged with the duty of devising and embellishing the festival. As it came to pass, the arrangements were made for the ceremony to take place on the Tenth of Thermidor—a day on which Robespierre and all Paris were concerned about a celebration of bloodier import. Thermidor, however, was still far off; and the red sun of Jacobin enthusiasm seemed as if it would shine unclouded for ever.

Even at the Jacobins, however, popular as he was, Robespierre felt every instant the necessity of walking cautiously. He was as far removed as possible from the position of Dictator that some historians persist in ascribing to him, even at the moment when they are enumerating the defeats which the party of Hébert was able to inflict upon him in the very bosom of the Mother Club itself. They make him the sanguinary dic-

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tator in one sentence, and the humiliated intriguer in the next. The latter is much the more correct account of the two, if we choose to call a man an intriguer who was honestly anxious to suppress what he considered a wicked faction, and yet had need of some dexterity to keep his own head upon his shoulders.

In the winter of 1793 the Municipal party, guided by Hébert and Chaumette, made their memorable attempt to extirpate Christianity in France. The doctrine of D'Holbach's supper-table had for a short space the arm of flesh and the sword of the temporal power on its side. It was the first appearance of dogmatic atheism in Europe as a militant political force. This makes it one of the most remarkable moments in the Revolution, just as it makes the Revolution itself the most remarkable moment in modern history. On the whole it is a very mild story compared with the atrocities of the Jewish records or the crimes of Catholicism. The worst charge against the party of Chaumette is that they were intolerant, but this charge cannot lie in the mouth of persecuting churches.

Historical recriminations, however, are not very edifying. It is perfectly fair, when Catholics talk of the atheist Terror, to rejoin that the retainers of Anjou and Montpensier slew more men and women on the first day of the Saint Bartholomew than perished in Paris through the Years I. and II. But the retort does us no good beyond the region of dialectic; it rather brings us down to the level of the sectaries whom it crushes. Opinions are less important than the spirit and temper with which they possess us, and even good opinions are worth little unless we hold them in a broad, intelligent, and spacious way. Now some of the opinions of Chaumette were full of enlightenment

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and hope. He had a generous and vivid faith in humanity, and he showed the natural effect of abandoning belief in another life by his energetic interest in arrangements for improving the lot of man in this life. But it would be far better to share the opinions of a virtuous and benignant priest like the Bishop in Victor Hugo's *Misérables*, than to hold those opinions of Chaumette as he held them, with a rancorous intolerance, a reckless disregard of the rights and feelings of others, and a shallow forgetfulness of all that great and precious part of our natures that lies out of the immediate domain of the logical understanding. One can understand how an honest man would abhor the darkness and tyranny of the church. But then to borrow the same absolutism in the interests of new light, was inevitably to bring the new light into the same abhorrence as had befallen the old system of darkness. And this is exactly what happened. In every family where a mother sought to have her child baptized, or where sons and daughters sought to have the dying spirit of the old consoled by the last sacrament, there sprang up a bitter enemy to the government that had closed the churches and proscribed the priests.

How could a society whose spiritual life had been nourished in the solemn mysticism of the Middle Ages, suddenly turn to embrace a gaudy paganism? The common self-respect of humanity was outraged by apostate priests who, whether under the pressure of fear of Chaumette, or in a very superfluity of folly, hastened to proclaim the charlatanry of their past lives, as they filed before the Convention, led by the Archbishop of Paris, and accompanied by rude acolytes bearing piles of the robes and the vessels of silver and gold with which they had once served their holy offices. "Our enemies," Voltaire had said, "have always on their side the fat of the land, the sword, the

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strong-box, and the *canaille*." For a moment all these forces were on the other side.

Instead of defying the church by the theatrical march of the Goddess of Reason under the great sombre arches of Notre Dame, Chaumette should have found comfort in a firm calculation of the conditions. "You," he might have said to the priests,—"you have so debilitated the minds of men and women by your promises and your dreams, that many a generation must come and go before Europe can throw off the yoke. We give you all the advantages that you can get from the sincerity and worth of the good and simple among you. We give you all that the bad among you may get by resort to your system—its bribes to mental indolence, its hypocritical affectations in the pulpit, its tyranny in the closet, its false speciousness in the world, its menace at the death-bed. We will not attack you as Voltaire did; we shall explain you. History will place your dogma in its class; from being the guide to millions of human lives, it will become a chapter in a book. As History explains your dogma, so Science will dry it up; the conception of law will silently make the conception of the daily miracle seem impossible; the mental climate will gradually deprive your symbols of their nourishment, and men will turn their backs on you, not because they have confuted you, but because, like witch-craft or astrology, you have ceased to interest them."

Alas, the speculation of the century had not rightly attuned men's minds to this firm confidence in the virtue of liberty, sounding like a bell through all distractions. None of these high things were said. The temples were closed, the sacred symbols defiled, the priests maltreated, the worshippers dispersed. The Commune of Paris imitated the policy of the King of France who revoked the

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Edict of Nantes, and democratic atheism parodied the dragonnades of absolutist Catholicism.

Robespierre was unutterably outraged by the proceedings of the atheists. They perplexed him as a politician intent upon order, and they afflicted him sorely as an ardent disciple of the Savoyard Vicar. Hébert, however, was so strong that it needed some courage to attack him, nor did Robespierre dare to withstand him to the face. But he did not flinch from making an energetic assault upon atheism and the excesses of its partisans. His admirers usually count his speech of the Twenty-first of November one of the most admirable of his oratorical successes. The Sphinx still sits inexorable at our gates, and his words have lost none of their interest. "Every philosopher and every individual," he said, "may adopt whatever opinion he pleases about atheism. Any one who wishes to make such an opinion into a crime is an insensate; but the public man or the legislator who should adopt such a system, would be a hundred times more insensate still. The National Convention abhors it. The Convention is not the author of a scheme of metaphysics. It was not to no purpose that it published the Declaration of the Rights of Man in presence of the Supreme Being. I shall be told perhaps that I have a narrow intelligence, that I am a man of prejudice, and a fanatic. I have already said that I spoke neither as an individual nor as a philosopher with a system, but as a representative of the people. *Atheism is aristocratic. The idea of a great Being who watches over oppressed innocence and punishes triumphant crime is essentially the idea of the people.* This is the sentiment of Europe and the Universe; it is the sentiment of the French nation. That nation is attached neither to priests, nor to superstition, nor to ceremonies; it is attached only to worship in itself, or

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in other words to the idea of an incomprehensible Power, the terror of wrongdoers, the stay and comfort of virtue, to which it delights to render words of homage that are all so many anathemas against injustice and triumphant crime."

This is Robespierre's favourite attitude, the priest posing as statesman. Like others, he declares the Supreme Power incomprehensible, and then describes him in terms of familiar comprehension. He first declares atheism an open choice, and then he brands it with the most odious epithet in the accepted vocabulary of the hour. Danton followed practically the same line, though saying much less about it. "If Greece," he said in the Convention, "had its Olympian games, France too shall solemnise her sans-culottid days. The people will have high festivals; they will offer incense to the Supreme Being, to the master of nature; for we never intended to annihilate the reign of superstition in order to set up the reign of atheism. . . . If we have not honoured the priest of error and fanaticism, neither do we wish to honour the priest of incredulity: we wish to serve the people. I demand that there shall be an end of these anti-religious masquerades in the Convention."

There was an end of the masquerading, but the Hébertists still kept their ground. Danton, Robespierre, and the Committee were all equally impotent against them for some months longer. The revolutionary force had been too strong to be resisted by any government since the Paris insurgents had carried both king and Assembly in triumph from Versailles in the October of 1789. It was now too strong for those who had begun to strive with all their might to build a new government out of the agencies that had shattered the old. For some months the battle that had been opened by Robespierre's remonstrance against atheistic intolerance, degenerated into a series of masked skirmishes.

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The battle-ground of rival principles was overshadowed by the baleful wings of the genius of demonic Hate. *Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni*; the banners of the King of the Pit came forth. The scene at the Cordeliers for a time became as frantic as a Council of the Early Church settling the true composition of the Holy Trinity. Or it recalls the fierce and bloody contentions between Demos and Oligarchy in an old Greek town. We think of the day in the harbour of Corcyra when the Athenian admiral who had come to deliver the people, sailed out to meet the Spartan enemy, and on turning round to see if his Corcyrean allies were following, saw them following indeed, but the crew of every ship striving in enraged conflict with one another. Collot D'Herbois had come back in hot haste from Lyons, where, along with Fouché, he had done his best to carry out the decree of the Convention, that not one stone of the city should be left on the top of another, and that even its very name should cease from the lips of men. Carrier was recalled from Nantes, where his feats of ingenious massacre had rivalled the exploits of the cruellest and maddest of the Roman Emperors. The presence of these men of blood gave new courage and resolution to the Hébertists. Though the alliance was informal, yet as against Danton, Camille Desmoulins, and the rest of the Indulgents, as well as against Robespierre, they made common cause.

Camille Desmoulins attacked Hébert in successive numbers of a journal that is perhaps the one truly literary monument of this stage of the Revolution. Hébert retaliated by impugning the patriotism of Desmoulins in the Club, and the unfortunate wit, notwithstanding the efforts of Robespierre on his behalf, was for a while turned out of the sacred precincts. The power of the extreme faction was shown in relation to other prominent members of the party whom they loved to stigmatise by the

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deadly names of Indulgent and Moderantist. Even Danton himself was attacked (December 1793), and the integrity of his patriotism brought into question. Robespierre made an energetic defence of his great rival in the hierarchy of revolution, and the defence saved Danton from the mortal ignominy of expulsion from the communion of the orthodox. On the other hand, Anacharsis Clootz, that guileless ally of the party of delirium, was less fortunate. Robespierre assailed the cosmopolitan for being a German baron, for having four thousand pounds a year, and for striking his sans-culottism some notes higher than the regular pitch. Even M. Louis Blanc calls this an iniquity, and sets it down as the worst page in Robespierre's life. Others have described Robespierre as struck at this time by the dire malady of kings—hatred of the Idea. It seems, however, a hard saying that devotion to the Idea is to extinguish common sense. Clootz, notwithstanding his simple and disinterested character, and his possession of some rays of the modern illumination, was one of the least sane of all the men who in the exultation of their foolish gladness were suddenly caught up by that great wheel of fire. All we can say is that Robespierre's bitter demeanour towards Clootz was ungenerous; but then this is only natural in him. Robespierre often clothed cool policy in the semblance of clemency, but I cannot hear in any phrase he ever used, or see in any measure he ever proposed, the mark of true generosity; of kingliness of spirit, not a trace. He had no element of ready and cordial propitiation, an element that can never be wanting in the greatest leaders in time of storm. If he resisted the atrocious proposals to put Madame Elizabeth to death, he was thinking not of mercy or justice, but of the mischievous effect that her execution would have upon the public opinion of Europe.

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This did not prevent him from seeing and denouncing the bloody extravagances of the Proconsuls, the representatives of Parisian authority in the provinces; nor from standing firm against the execution of the Seventy-Three, who had been bold enough to question the purgation of the National Convention on the Thirty-first of May. But the return of Collot d'Herbois made the situation more intricate. Collot was by his position the ally of Billaud, and to attack him, therefore, was to attack the most powerful member of the Committee of Public Safety. Billaud was too formidable. He was always the impersonation of the ruder genius of the Revolution, and the incarnation of the philosophy of the Terror, not as a delirium, but as a piece of deliberate policy. His pale, sober, and concentrated physiognomy seemed a perpetual menace. He had no gifts of speech, but his silence made people shudder.

Robespierre began to suspect that he had been premature; and a convenient illness, which some suppose to have been feigned, excused his withdrawal for some weeks from a scene where he felt that he could no longer see clear. We cannot doubt that both he and Danton were perfectly assured that the anarchic party must unavoidably roll headlong into the abyss. But the hour of doom was uncertain. To make a mistake as to the right moment, to hurry the crisis, was instant death. Robespierre was a more adroit calculator than Danton. But his habit of waiting on force, instead of, like the other, taking the initiative with force, had trained his sight. The mixture of astuteness with his scruple, of egoistic policy with his stiffness for doctrine, gave him an advantage over Danton, that made his life worth exactly three months' more purchase than Danton's. It has been said that Spinozism or Transcendentalism in poetic production becomes Machiavellism in

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reflection: for the same reasons we may always expect sentimentalism in theory to become under the pressure of action a very self-protecting guile. Robespierre's mind was not rich nor flexible enough for true statesmanship, and it is a grave mistake to suppose that the various cunning tacks in which his career abounds, were any sign of genuine versatility or resource or political growth and expansion. They were, in fact, the resort of a man whose nerves were weaker than his volition. Force of head did not match Robespierre's spiritual ambition. He was not, we repeat, a coward in any common sense; in that case he would have remained quiet among the croaking frogs of the Marsh, and by and by have come to hold a portfolio under the first Consul. He did not fear death, and he envied with consuming envy those to whom nature had given the qualities of initiative. But his nerves played him false. The consciousness of having to resolve to take a decided step alone, was the precursor of a fit of trembling. His heart did not fail, but he could not control the parched voice, nor the twitching features, nor the palsy of inner misgiving. In this respect Robespierre recalls a more illustrious man; we think of Cicero calling upon the Senate to decide for him whether he should order the execution of the Catilinarian conspirators. It is to be said, however, in his favour that he had the art, which Cicero lacked, to hide his pusillanimity. Robespierre knew himself, and did his best to keep his own secret.

His absence during the final crisis of the anarchic party allowed events to ripen, without committing him to the initiative in dangerous action that he had dreaded on the Tenth of August, as he dreaded it on every other decisive day of this burning time. The party of the Commune became more and more daring in their invectives against the Convention and the Committees. At length they proclaimed

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open insurrection. But Paris was cold, and opinion was divided. In the night of the Thirteenth of March, Hébert, Chaumette, Clootz were arrested. The next day Robespierre recovered sufficiently to appear at the Jacobin Club. He joined his colleagues of the Committee of Public Safety in striking the blow. On the Twenty-fourth of March the Ultra-Revolutionist leaders were beheaded.

This first bloody breach in the Jacobin ranks was speedily followed by the second. The Right wing of the opposition to the Committee soon followed the Left down the ways to dusty death, and the execution of the Anarchists only preceded by a week the arrest of the Moderates. When the seizure of Danton had once before been discussed in the Committee, Robespierre resisted the proposal violently. We have already seen how he defended Danton at the Jacobin Club, when the Club underwent the process of purification in the winter. What produced this sudden tack? How came Robespierre to assent in March to a violence he had angrily discountenaced in February? There had been no change in the policy or attitude of Danton himself. The military operations against the domestic and foreign enemies were no sooner fairly in the way of success, than Danton began to meditate in serious earnest the consolidation of a republican system of law and justice. He would fain have stayed the Terror. "Let us leave something," he said, "to the guillotine of opinion." He aided, no doubt, in the formation of the Revolutionary Tribunal, but this was exactly in harmony with his usual policy of controlling popular violence without alienating the strength of popular sympathy. The process of the tribunal was rough and summary, but it was fairer—until Robespierre's Law of Prairial—than people usually suppose, and it was the very temple of the goddess of Justice herself compared with the September massacres. "Let us prove

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ourselves terrible," Danton said, "to relieve the people from the necessity of being so." His activity had been incessant in urging and superintending the great levies against the foreigner; he had gone repeatedly on distant and harassing expeditions, as the representative of the Convention at the camps on the frontier. In the midst of all this he found time to press forward measures for the instruction of the young, and for the due appointment of judges, and his head was full of ideas for the construction of a permanent executive council. It was this that made him eager for a cessation of the method of Terror, and it was this that made the Committee of Public Safety his implacable enemy.

Why, then, did Robespierre, who also passed as a man of order and humanity, not continue to support Danton after the suppression of the Hébertists, as he had supported him before? The common and facile answer is that he was moved by a malignant desire to put a rival out of the way. On the whole, the evidence seems to support Napoleon's opinion that Robespierre was incapable of voting for the death of anybody in the world on grounds of personal enmity. And his acquiescence in the ruin of Danton is intelligible enough on the grounds of policy. The Committee hated Danton for the good reason that he had openly attacked them, and his cry for clemency was an inflammatory and dangerous protest against their system. Now Robespierre, rightly or wrongly, had made up his mind that the Committee was the instrument by which, and which only, he could work out his own vague schemes of power and reconstruction. And, in any case, how could he resist the Committee? The famous insurrectionary force of Paris, which Danton had been the first to organise against a government, had just been chilled by the fall of the Hébertists. Least of all

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could this force be relied upon to rise in defence of the very chief whose every word for many weeks past had been a protest against the Communal leaders. In separating himself from the Ultras, Danton had cut off the great reservoir of his peculiar strength.

It may be said that the Convention was the proper centre of resistance to the designs of the Committee, and that if Danton and Robespierre had united their forces in the Convention they would have defeated Billaud and his allies. This seems more than doubtful. The Committee had acquired an immense preponderance over the Convention. They had been eminently successful in the immense tasks imposed upon them. They had the prestige not only of being the government —so great a thing in a country that had just emerged from the condition of a centralised monarchy; they had also the prestige of being a government that had done its work triumphantly. We are now in March. In July we shall find that Robespierre adopted the very policy we are now discussing, of playing off the Convention against the Committee. In July that policy ended in his headlong fall. Why should it have been any more successful four months earlier?

What we may say is, that Robespierre was bound in all morality to defend Danton in the Convention at every hazard. Possibly; but then to run risks for chivalry's sake was not in Robespierre's nature, and a man cannot climb out beyond the limitations of his own character. His narrow head and thin blood and unstable nerve, his calculating humour and his frigid egoism, disinclined him to all games of chance. His apologists have sought to put a more respectable colour on his abandonment of Danton. The precisian, they say, disapproved of Danton's lax and heedless courses. Danton said to him one day: "What do

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I care? Public opinion is a strumpet, and posterity a piece of nonsense." How should the puritanical lawyer endure such cynicism as this? And Danton delighted in inflicting these coarse shocks. Again, Danton had given various gross names of contempt to Saint-Just. Was Robespierre not to feel insults offered to the ablest and most devoted of his lieutenants? What was more important than all, the acclamations with which the partisans of reaction greeted the fall of the Ultras, made it necessary to give instant and unmistakable notice to the foes of the Revolution that the goddess of the scorching eye and fiery hand still grasped the axe of vengeance.

These are pleas invented after the fact. All goes to show that Robespierre was really moved by nothing more than his invariable dread of being left behind, of finding himself on the weaker side, of not seeming practical and political enough. And having made up his mind that the stronger party was bent on the destruction of the Dantonists, he became fiercer than Billaud himself. It is constantly seen that the waverer, of nervous atrabiliar constitution, no sooner overcomes the agony of irresolution, than he flings himself on his object with a vindictive tenacity that seems to repay him for all the moral humiliation inflicted on him by his stifled doubts. He redeems the slowness of his approach by the fury of his spring. "Robespierre," says M. D'Héricault, "precipitated himself to the front of the opinion that was yelling against his friends of yesterday. In order to keep his usual post in the van of the Revolution, in order to secure the advantage to his own popularity of an execution which the public voice seemed to demand, he came forward as the author of that execution, though only the day before he had hesitated about its utility, and though it was, in truth, far less useful to him than it proved to be to his future antagonists."

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Robespierre first alarmed Danton's friends by assuming a certain icy coldness of manner, and by some menacing phrases about the faction of the so-called Moderates. Danton had gone, as he often did, to his native village of Arcis-sur-Aube, to seek repose and a little clearness of sight in the night that wrapped him about. He was devoid of personal ambition; he never had any humour for mere factious struggles. His, again, was the temperament of violent force, and in such types the reaction is tremendous. The indomitable activity of the last twenty months had bred weariness of spirit. The nemesis of a career of strenuous Will in large natures is apt to be a sudden sense of the irony of things. In Danton, as with Byron, it happened afterwards, the vehemence of the revolutionary spirit was touched by this desolating irony. His friends tried to rouse him. It is not clear that he could have done anything. The balance of force, after the suppression of the Hébertists, was irretrievably against him, as calculation had already revealed to Robespierre.

There are various stories of the pair having met at dinner almost on the eve of Danton's arrest, and parting with sombre disquietude on both sides. The interview, with its champagne, its interlocutors, its play of sinister repartee, may possibly have taken place, but the alleged details are plainly apocryphal. After all, *Religion ist in der Thiere Trieb*, says Wallenstein; "the very savage drinks not with the victim, into whose breast he means to plunge a sword." Danton was warned that Robespierre was plotting his arrest. "If I thought he had the bare idea," said Danton with something of Gargantuan hyperbole, "I would eat his bowels out." Such was the disdain with which the "giant of the mighty bone and bold emprise" thought of our meagre-hearted pedant. With singular baseness, Robespierre handed over to Saint-Just a

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collection of notes, to serve as material for the indictment which Saint-Just was to present to the Convention. They comprised everything that suspicion could interpret malignantly, from the most conspicuous acts of Danton's public life, down to the casual freedom of private discourse.

Worse was to follow. After the arrest, and on the proceedings to obtain the assent of the Convention to the trial of Danton and others of its members, one only of their friends had the courage to rise and demand that they should be heard at the bar. Robespierre burst out in cold rage; he asked whether they had undergone so many heroic sacrifices, counting among them these acts of "painful severity," only to fall under the yoke of a band of domineering intriguers; and he cried out impatiently that they would brook no claim of privilege, and suffer no rotten idol. The word was felicitously chosen, for the Convention dreaded to have its independence suspected, and it dreaded this all the more because at this time its independence did not really exist. The vote against Danton was unanimous. On the afternoon of the Sixteenth Germinal (April 5, 1794) Paris in amazement and some stupefaction saw the once-dreaded Titan of the Mountain fast bound in the tumbril. "I leave it all in a frightful welter," Danton is reported to have said. "Not a man of them has an idea of government. Robespierre will follow me; he is dragged down by me. Ah, better be a poor fisherman than meddle with the governing of men!"

We may pause for a moment over a calmer reminiscence. This was the very day on which the virtuous and high-minded Condorcet quitted the friendly roof that for nine months had concealed him from the search of proscription. The same week he was found dead in his prison. While Danton was storming with impotent thunder

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before the tribunal, Condorcet was writing the closing words of his *Sketch of Human Progress.* "How this picture of the human race freed from all its fetters,—withdrawn from the empire of chance, as from that of the enemies of progress, and walking with firm and assured step in the way of truth, of virtue, and happiness, presents to the philosopher a sight that consoles him for the errors, the crimes, the injustice, with which the earth is yet stained, and of which he is not seldom the victim! It is in the contemplation of this picture that he receives the reward of his efforts for the progress of reason, for the defence of liberty. He ventures to link them with the eternal chain of the destinies of man: it is there he finds the true recompense of virtue, the pleasure of having done a lasting good; fate can no longer undo it, by any disastrous compensation that shall restore prejudice and bondage. This contemplation is for him a refuge, into which the recollection of his persecutors can never follow him; in which, living in thought with man reinstated in the rights and the dignity of his nature, he forgets man tormented and corrupted by greed, by base fear, by envy; it is here that he truly abides with his fellows, in an elysium that his reason has known how to create for itself, and that his love for humanity adorns with all purest delights."

In following the turns of the drama that was to end in Thermidor, we perceive that after the fall of the anarchists and the death of Danton, the relations between Robespierre and the Committees underwent a change. He, who had hitherto been on the side of government, became in turn an agency of opposition. He did this in the interest of ultimate stability, but the difference between the new position and the old is that he now distinctly associated the idea of a stable Republic with the

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ascendancy of his own religious conceptions. How far the ascendancy of his own personality was involved, we have no means of judging. The vulgar accusation against him is that he now deliberately aimed at a dictatorship, and began to plot with that end in view. It is always difficult to draw a line between mere arrogant egoism on the one hand, and on the other the identification of a man's personal elevation with the success of his public cause. The two ends probably become mixed in his mind, and if the cause be a good one, it is the height of pharisaical folly to quarrel with him, because he desires that his authority and renown shall receive some of the lustre of a far-shining triumph. We need not discuss the charge that he sought to make himself master. The important thing is that his mastery could have served no great end for France; that it would have been like himself, poor, barren, and hopelessly mediocre. And this would have been seen on every side. France had important military tasks to perform before her independence was assured. Robespierre hated war, and was jealous of every victory. France was in urgent need of stable government, of new laws, of ordered institutions. Robespierre never said a word to indicate that he had a single positive idea in his head on any of these great departments. And, more than this, he was incapable of making use of men who were more happily endowed than himself. He had never mastered that excellent observation of De Retz, that of all the qualities of a good party chief, none is so indispensable as being able to suppress on many occasions, and to hide on all, even legitimate suspicions. He was corroded by suspicion, and this paralyses able servants. Finally, Robespierre had no imperial quality, but only that bad imitation of it, a lively irritability.

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The base of Robespierre's schemes of social reconstruction now came clearly into view; an official Supreme Being, and a regulated Terror. The one was to fill up the spiritual void, and the other to satisfy all the exigencies of temporal things. It is to the credit of Robespierre's perspicacity that he should have recognised the human craving for religion, but this credit is little when we contemplate what passed for religion in his dim and narrow understanding. Rousseau had brought a new soul into the eighteenth century by the Savoyard Vicar's Profession of Faith, the most fervid expression of emotional deism that religious literature contains; vague, irrational, incoherent, cloudy; but the clouds all suffused with glowing gold. When we turn from that to the political version of it in Robespierre's discourse on the relations of religious and moral ideas with republican principles, we feel as one who revisits a landscape that had been made glorious to him by a summer sky and fresh liquid winds from the gates of the evening sun, only to find it dead under a grey heaven and harsh blasts from the north-east. Robespierre's words on the Supreme Being are never a stream of deep feeling; never the self-forgetting expansion of the religious soul, but only the composite of the rhetorician. Here, as in all else, his aspiration was far beyond his faculty; he yearned for great spiritual emotions, as he had yearned for great thoughts and great achievements, but his spiritual capacity was as meagre as his intelligence. And where Nature thus unequally yokes lofty objects in a man with a short mental reach, she stamps him with the very definition of mediocrity.

He seriously thought that he should conciliate the conservative and theological elements of the society at his feet, by such an opera-piece as the Feast of the Supreme Being. This was designed

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as a triumphant ripost to the Feast of Reason that Chaumette and his friends had celebrated in the winter. The energumens of the Goddess of Reason had now been some weeks in their bloody graves. Robespierre persuaded the Convention to decree an official recognition of the Supreme Being, and to attend a commemorative festival in honour of their mystic patron. He contrived to be chosen president for the decade in which the festival would fall. When the day came (20th Prairial, June 8, 1794), he clothed himself with more than even his usual care. As he looked out from the windows of the Tuileries upon the jubilant crowd in the gardens, he was intoxicated with enthusiasm. "O Nature," he cried, "how sublime thy power, how full of delight! How tyrants must grow pale at the idea of such a festival as this!" In pontifical pride he walked at the head of the procession, with flowers and wheat-ears in his hand, to the sound of chants and symphonies and choruses of maidens. On the first of the great basins in the gardens, David, the artist, had devised an allegorical structure for which an inauspicious doom was prepared. Atheism, a statue of life size, was throned in the midst of an amiable group of human Vices, with Madness by her side, and Wisdom menacing them with lofty wrath. Robespierre applied a torch to Atheism, but the wind was hostile. Atheism and Madness obstinately resisted the torch, and it was hapless Wisdom who took fire. A great car was drawn by milk-white oxen; in the front were ranged sheaves of golden grain; at the back shepherds and shepherdesses posed with scenic graces. The whole mummery was pagan, a bringing back of Cerealia and Thesmophoria to earth.

The famous republican Calendar, with its Prairials and Germinals, its Ventôses and Pluviôses, was an anachronism of the same kind. The

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association of worship and sacredness with the fruits of the earth, with the forces of nature, with the power and variety of the elements, could only be sincere so long as men really thought of all these things as animated each by a special will of its own. How could men go back to adore an outer world, after they had found out the secret that it is a mere huge group of phenomena, following fixed courses, and not obeying spontaneous and unaccountable volitions of their own? And what could be more puerile than the fanciful connection of the Supreme Being with a pastoral simplicity of life? This simplicity was gone, irrecoverably gone, with the passage from nomad times to the complexities of a modern society. To typify, therefore, the Supreme Being as specially interested in shocks of grain and in shepherds and shepherdesses, was to make him a mere figure in an idyll, the ornament of a rural mask, a god of the garden, instead of the sovereign director of the universal forces, and stern master of the destinies of men. Chaumette's commemoration of the Divinity of Reason was a sensible performance, compared with Robespierre's farcical repartee. It was something, as Comte has said, to select for worship man's most individual attribute. If they could not contemplate society as a whole, it was at least a gain to pay homage to that faculty in the human rulers of the world, which had brought the forces of nature — its pluviosity, nivosity, germinality, and vendemiarity—under the yoke for the service of men.

On the day of the Feast of the Supreme Being, the guillotine was concealed in the folds of rich hangings. It was the Twentieth of Prairial. Two days later Couthon proposed to the Convention the memorable Law of the Twenty-second Prairial. Robespierre was the draftsman, and the text of it

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still remains in his own writing. Of all laws ever passed in the world it is the most nakedly iniquitous. Tyrants have often substituted their own will for the ordered procedure of a tribunal, but no tyrant before ever went through the atrocious farce of deliberately making a tribunal the organised negation of security for justice. Couthon laid its theoretic base in a fallacy that must always be full of seduction to shallow persons in authority: "He who would subordinate the public safety to the inventions of jurisconsults, to the formulas of the court, is either an imbecile or a scoundrel." As if public safety could mean anything but the safety of the public. The author of the Law of Prairial had forgotten the minatory word of the sage to whom he had gone on a pilgrimage in the days of his youth. "All becomes legitimate and even virtuous," Helvétius had written, "on behalf of the public safety." Rousseau inscribed on the margin, "The public safety is nothing, unless individuals enjoy security." What security was possible under the Law of Prairial?

After the probity and good judgment of the tribunal, the two cardinal guarantees in state trials are accurate definition and proof. The offence must be capable of precise description, and the proof against an offender must conform to strict rule. The Law of Prairial violently infringed all three of these essential conditions of judicial equity. First, the number of the jury who had power to convict was reduced. Second, treason was made to consist in such vague and infinitely elastic kinds of action as inspiring discouragement, misleading opinion, depraving manners, corrupting patriots, abusing the principles of the Revolution by perfidious applications. Third, proof was to lie in the conscience of the jury; there was an end of preliminary inquiry, of witnesses in defence, and of counsel for the

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accused. Any kind of testimony was evidence, whether material or moral, verbal or written, if it was of a kind "likely to gain the assent of a man of reasonable mind."

What was Robespierre's motive in devising this instrument? The theory that he loved judicial murder for its own sake, can only be held by royalist or clerical partisans. It is like the theory of the vulgar kind of Protestantism, that Mary Tudor or Philip of Spain had a keen delight in shedding blood. Robespierre, like Mary and like Philip, would have been as well pleased if all the world would have come round to his mind without the destruction of a single life. The true inquisitor is a creature of policy, not a man of blood by taste. What, then, was the policy of Prairial? We know what was the general aim in Robespierre's mind at this point in the history of the Revolution. His brother Augustin was then the representative of the Convention with the army of Italy, and General Bonaparte was on terms of close intimacy with him. Bonaparte said long afterwards, when he was on his rock of St. Helena, that he saw long letters from Maximilian to Augustin Robespierre, all blaming the Conventional Commissioners—Tallien, Fouché, Barras, Collot, and the rest—for the horrors they perpetrated, and accusing them of ruining the Revolution by their atrocities. Again, there is abundant testimony that Robespierre did his best to induce the Committee of Public Safety to bring those malefactors to justice. The text of the Law itself discloses the same object. The vague phrases of depraving manners and applying revolutionary principles perfidiously, were exactly calculated to smite the band of men whose conduct was to Robespierre the scandal of the Revolution. And there was a curious clause in the law as originally presented, that deprived the Convention

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of the right of preventing measures against its own members. Robespierre's general design in short was to effect a further purgation of the Convention. There is no reason to suppose that he deliberately aimed at any more general extermination. On the other hand, it is incredible that he should merely have had in view the equalisation of rich and poor before the tribunals, by withdrawing the aid of counsel and testimony to civic character from both rich and poor alike.

If Robespierre's design was what we believe it to have been, the result was ghastly failure. The Committee of Public Safety would not consent to apply his law against the men for whom he had specially designed it. The weapon that he had forged was seized by the Committee of General Security, and Paris was plunged into the fearful days of the Great Terror. The number of persons put to death by the Revolutionary Tribunal before the Law of Prairial had been comparatively moderate. From the creation of the Tribunal in April 1793, down to the execution of the Hébertists in March 1794, the number of persons condemned to death was 505. From the death of the Hébertists down to the death of Robespierre, the number of the condemned was 2158. One half of the entire number of victims, namely 1356, were guillotined after the Law of Prairial. Innocent women no less than innocent men, poor no less than rich, those in whom life was almost spent, no less than those in whom its pulse was strongest, virtuous no less than vicious, were sent off in woe-stricken batches all those summer days. A man was informed against; he was seized in his bed at five in the morning; at seven he was taken to the Conciergerie; at nine he received information of the charge against him; at ten he went into the dock; by two in the afternoon he was condemned; by four his head lay in the executioner's basket.

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What stamps the system of the Terror at this date with a wickedness that cannot be effaced, is that at no moment was the danger from foreign or domestic foe less serious. We may forgive something to panic. The proscriptions of an earlier date in Paris were not excessively sanguinary, if we remember that the city abounded in royalists and other reactionists, who were dangerous in fomenting discouragement and spreading confusion. If there ever is an excuse for martial law, the French government were warranted in resorting to it in 1793. Paris in those days was like a city beleaguered, and the world does not use very harsh words about the commandant of a besieged town who puts to death traitors found within his walls. Opinion in England at this very epoch encouraged the Tory government to pass a Treason Bill, that introduced as vague a definition of treasonable offence as even the Law of Prairial itself. Windham did not shrink from declaring in Parliament that he and his colleagues were determined to exact "a rigour beyond the law." And they were as good as their word. The Jacobins had no monopoly of either cruel law or cruel breach of law in the eighteenth century. Only thirty years before, opinion in Pennsylvania had prompted a hideous massacre of harmless Indians as a deed acceptable to God, and the grandson of William Penn proclaimed a bounty of fifty dollars for the scalp of a female Indian, and three times as much for a male. A man would have had quite as good a chance of justice from the Revolutionary Tribunal, as at the hands of Braxfield, the Scotch judge, who condemned Muir and Palmer for sedition in 1793, and told the government, with a brazen front worthy of Carrier or Collot d'Herbois themselves, that, if they would only send him prisoners, he would find law for them.

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Robespierre was inflamed with resentment, not because so many people were guillotined every day, but because the objects of his own enmity were not among them. He was chagrined at the miscarriage of his scheme; but the chagrin had its root in his desire for order, and not in his humanity. A good man—say, so imperfectly good a man as Danton—could not have endured life after enacting such a law and seeing the ghastly work that it was doing. He could hardly have contented himself with drawing tears from the company in Madame Duplay's little parlour, by his pathetic recitations from Corneille and Racine, or with listening to melting notes from the violin of Le Bas. It is commonly said by Robespierre's defenders that he withdrew from the Committee of Public Safety, as soon as he found out that he was powerless to arrest the daily shedding of blood. The older assumption used to be that he left Paris, and ceased to be cognisant of the Committee's deliberations. The minutes, however, prove that this was not the case. Robespierre signed papers nearly every day of Messidor—(June 19 to July 18) the blood-stained month between Prairial and Thermidor—and was thoroughly aware of the doings of the Committee.

In passing the Law of Prairial, Robespierre's designs—and they were meritorious and creditable designs enough in themselves—had been directed against the corrupt chiefs, such as Tallien and Fouché, and against the fierce and coarse spirits of the Committee of General Security, such as Vadier and Voulland. Robespierre was above all a precisian. He had a sentimental sympathy with the common people in the abstract, but his spiritual pride, his pedantry, his formalism, his personal fastidiousness, were all wounded to the very quick by the kind of men whom the Revolution had

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thrown to the surface. Gouverneur Morris, then the American minister, describes most of the members of the two Committees as the very dregs of humanity, with whom it is a stain to have any dealings; as degraded men only worthy of the profoundest contempt. Danton had said: "Robespierre is the least of a scoundrel of any of the band." The Committee of General Security represented the very elements by which Robespierre was most revolted. They offended his respectability; their evil manners seemed to tarnish the good name that his vanity hoped to make as revered all over Europe as it already was among his partisans in France. It was indispensable therefore to cut them off from the revolutionary government, just as Hébert and as Danton had been cut off. His colleagues of Public Safety refused to lend themselves to this. Henceforth, with characteristically narrow tenacity, he looked round for new combinations, with no broader design than to enable him to punish these particular objects of his very just detestation.

The position of sections and interests that ended in the Revolution of Thermidor, is one of the most entangled in the history of faction. It would take a volume to follow out all the peripeteias of the drama. Here we can only enumerate in a few sentences the parties to the contest and the conditions of the struggle. The reader will easily discern the difficulty in Robespierre's way of making an effective combination. First, there were the two Committees. Of these the one, the General Security, was thoroughly hostile to Robespierre; its members, as we have said, were wild and hardy spirits, with no political conception, and with a complete contempt for fine phrases and philosophical principles. They knew Robespierre's hatred for them, and they heartily returned it. They were the steadfast centre of the changing

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schemes that ended in his downfall. The Committee of Public Safety was divided. Carnot hated Saint-Just, and Collot d'Herbois hated Robespierre, and Billaud had a sullen distrust of Robespierre's counsels. The object of the Billaudists was to retain their power, and their power was always menaced from two quarters, the Convention and Paris. If they let Robespierre have his own way against his enemies, would they not be at his mercy whenever he chose to devise a popular insurrection against them? Yet if they withstood Robespierre, they could only do so through the agency of the Convention, and to fall back upon the Convention would be to give that body an express invitation to resume the power that had, in the pressure of the crisis a year before, been delegated to the Committee, and periodically renewed afterwards. The dilemma of Billaud seemed desperate, and events afterwards proved that it was so.

If we turn to the Convention, we find the position equally distracting. They, too, feared another insurrection and a second decimation. If the Right helped Robespierre to destroy the Fouchés and Vadiers, he would be stronger than ever; and what security had they against a repetition of the violence of the Thirty-first of May? If the Dantonists joined in destroying Robespierre, they would be helping the Right, and what security had they against a Girondin reaction? On the other hand, the Centre might fairly hope, just what Billaud feared, that if the Committee came to the Convention to crush Robespierre this would end in a combination strong enough to enable the Convention to crush the Committees.

Much depended on military success. The victories of the generals were the strength of the Committee. For so long it would be difficult to turn opinion against a triumphant administration.

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"At the first defeat," Robespierre had said to Barère, "I await you." But the defeat did not come. The plotting went on with incessant activity; on one hand, Robespierre, aided by Saint-Just and Couthon, strengthening himself at the Jacobin Club, and through that among the sections; on the other, the Mountain and the Committee of General Security trying to win over the Right, more contemptuously christened the Marsh or the Belly, of the Convention. The Committee of Public Safety was not yet fully decided how to act.

At the end of the first week of Thermidor, Robespierre could endure the tension no longer. He had tried to fortify his nerves for the struggle by riding, but with so little success that he was lifted fainting off his horse. He endeavoured to steady himself by diligent pistol-practice. But nothing gave him initiative and the sinews of action. Saint-Just urged him to raise Paris. Some bold men proposed to carry off the members of the Committee bodily from their midnight deliberations. Robespierre declined, and fell back on what he took to be his greatest strength and most unfailing resource; he prepared a speech. On the Eighth of Thermidor he delivered it to the Convention, amid intense excitement both within its walls and without. All Paris knew that they were now on the eve of one more of the famous Days; the Revolution of Thermidor had begun.

The speech of the Eighth Thermidor has seemed to men of all parties since a masterpiece of tactical ineptitude. If Robespierre had been a statesman instead of a phrasemonger, he had a clear course. He ought to have taken the line of argument that Danton would have taken. That is to say, he ought to have identified himself fully with the interests and security of the Convention; to have accepted the growing resolution to close the Terror;

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to have boldly pressed the abolition of the Committee of General Security, and the removal from the Committee of Public Safety of Billaud, Collot, Barère; to have proposed to send fifty persons to Cayenne for life; and to have urged a policy of peace with the foreign powers. This was the substantial wisdom and real interest of the position. The task was difficult, because his hearers had the best possible reasons for knowing that the author of the Law of Prairial was a Terrorist on principle. And in truth we know that Robespierre had no definite intention of erecting clemency into a rule. He had not mental strength enough to throw off the profound apprehension that the incessant alarms of the last five years had engendered in him; and the only device he could imagine for maintaining the Republic against traitors, was to stimulate the rigour of the Revolutionary Tribunal.

If, however, Robespierre lacked the grasp that might have made him the representative of a broad and stable policy, it was at least his interest to persuade the men of the Plain that he entertained no designs against them. And this is what in his own mind he intended. But to do it effectively, it was clearly best to tell his hearers, in so many words, whom he really wished them to strike. That would have relieved the majority, and banished the suspicion that had been busily fomented by his enemies, that he had in his pocket a long list of their names for proscription. But Robespierre, having for the first time in his life ventured on aggressive action without the support of a definite party, faltered. He dared not designate his enemies face to face by name. Instead of that, he talked vaguely of conspirators against the Republic, and calumniators of himself. There was not a single, definite, unmistakable sentence in the speech. The men of the Plain were

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insecure and doubtful; they had no certainty that among conspirators and calumniators he did not include too many of themselves. People are not so readily seized by grand phrases, when their heads are at stake. The sitting was long, and marked by changing currents and reverses. When they broke up, all was left uncertain. Robespierre had suffered a check. Billaud felt that he could no longer hesitate in joining the combination against his colleague. Each party was aware that the next day must seal the fate of one or other of them. There is a legend that in the evening Robespierre walked in the Champs Élysées with his betrothed, accompanied as usual by his faithful dog, Brount. They admired the purple of the sunset, and talked of the prospect of a glorious to-morrow. But this is apocryphal. The evening was passed in no lover's saunterings, but amid the storm and uproar of the Club. He went to the Jacobins to read over again his speech of the day. "It is my testament of death," he said, amid the passionate protestations of his devoted followers. He had been talking for the last three years of his willingness to drink the hemlock, and to offer his breast to the poniards of tyrants. That was a fashion of the speech of the time, and in earlier days it had been more than a fashion of speech, for Brunswick would have given them short shrift. But now, when he talked of his last testament, Robespierre did not intend it to be such if he could prevent it. When he went to rest that night, he had a tolerably calm hope that he should win the next day's battle in the Convention, when he was aware that Saint-Just would attack the Committees openly and directly. If he would have allowed his band to invade the Pavillon de Flore, and carry off or slay the Committees who sat up through the night, the battle would have been won when he awoke. His friends are justified in

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saying that his strong respect for legality was the cause of his ruin.

Men in all ages have had a superstitious fondness for connecting awful events in their lives with portents among the outer elements. It was noticed that the heat during the terrible days of Thermidor was more intense than had been known within the memory of man. The thermometer never fell below sixty-five degrees in the coolest part of the night, and in the daytime men and women and beasts of burden fell down dead in the streets. By five o'clock in the morning of the Ninth Thermidor, the galleries of the Convention were filled by a boisterous and excited throng. At ten o'clock the proceedings began as usual with the reading of correspondence from the departments and from the armies. Robespierre, who had been escorted from his lodgings by the usual body of admirers, instead of taking his ordinary seat, remained standing by the side of the tribune. It is a familiar fact that moments of appalling suspense are precisely those in which we are most ready involuntarily to note a trifle; everybody observed that Robespierre wore the coat of violet-blue silk and the white nankeens in which a few weeks previously he had done honour to the Supreme Being.

The galleries seemed as enthusiastic as ever. The men of the Plain and the Marsh had lost the abject mien with which they usually cowered before Robespierre's glance; they wore a courageous air of judicial reserve. The leaders of the Mountain wandered restlessly to and fro among the corridors. At noon Tallien saw that Saint-Just had ascended the tribune. Instantly he rushed down into the chamber, knowing that the battle had now begun in fierce earnest. Saint-Just had not got through two sentences before Tallien interrupted him. He began to insist with

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energy that there should be an end to the equivocal phrases with which Paris had been too long alarmed by the Triumvirate. Billaud, fearing to be outdone in the attack, hastily forced his way to the tribune, broke into what Tallien was saying, and proceeded dexterously to discredit Robespierre's allies without at once assailing Robespierre himself. Le Bas ran in a fury to stop him; Collot d'Herbois, the president, declared Le Bas out of order; the hall rang with cries of "To prison! To the Abbey!" and Le Bas was driven from the tribune. This was the beginning of the tempest. Robespierre's enemies knew that they were fighting for their lives, and this inspired them with a strong and resolute power that is always impressive in popular assemblies. He still thought himself secure. Billaud pursued his accusations. Robespierre, at last, unable to control himself, scaled the tribune. There suddenly burst forth from Tallien and his partisans vehement shouts of "Down with the tyrant! down with the tyrant!" The galleries were swept by a frenzy of vague agitation; the president's bell poured loud incessant clanging into the tumult; the men of the Plain held themselves firm and silent; in the tribune raged ferocious groups, Tallien menacing Robespierre with a dagger, Billaud roaring out proposals to arrest this person and that, Robespierre gesticulating, threatening, yelling, shrieking. His enemies knew that if he were once allowed to get a hearing, his authority might even yet overawe the waverers. A penetrative word or a heroic gesture might lose them the day. The majority of the chamber still hesitated. They called for Barère, in whose adroit faculty for discovering the winning side they had the confidence of long experience. Robespierre, recovering some of his calm, and perceiving now that he had really to deal with a serious revolt, again asked to be heard

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before Barère. But the cries for Barère were louder than ever. Barère spoke, in a sense hostile to Robespierre, but warily and without naming him.

Then there was a momentary lull. The Plain was uncertain. The battle might even now turn either way. Robespierre made another attempt to speak, but Tallien with intrepid fury broke out into a torrent of louder and more vehement invective. Robespierre's shrill voice was heard in disjected snatches, amidst the violent tones of Tallien, the yells of the president calling Robespierre to order, the murderous clanging of the bell. Then came that supreme hour of the struggle, whose tale has been so often told, when Robespierre turned from his old allies of the Mountain, and succeeded in shrieking out an appeal to the probity and virtue of the Right and the Plain. To his horror, even these despised men, after a slight movement, remained mute. Then his cheeks blanched, and the sweat ran down his face. But anger and scornful impatience swiftly came back and restored him. *President of assassins*, he cried out to Thuriot, *for the last time I ask to be heard. Thou canst not speak*, called one, *the blood of Danton chokes thee.* He flung himself down the steps of the tribune, and rushed towards the benches of the Right. *Come no further*, cried another, *Vergniaud and Condorcet sat here.* He regained the tribune, but his speech was gone. He was reduced to the dregs of an impotent and gasping voiceless gesticulation, like the strife of one in a nightmare.

The day was lost. The Right, the Plain, even the galleries, despised the man who had succumbed. If Robespierre had possessed the physical strength of Mirabeau or Danton, the Ninth Thermidor would have been another of his victories. He was crushed by the relentless ferocity and endurance of his antagonists. A decree for his arrest was

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resolved upon by acclamation. He cast a glance at the galleries, as marvelling that they should remain passive in face of an outrage on his person. They were mute. The ushers advanced with hesitation to do their duty, and not without trembling carried him away, along with Couthon and Saint-Just. The brother, for whom he had made honourable sacrifices in days that seemed to be divided from the present by an abyss of centuries, insisted with fine heroism on sharing his fate, and Augustin Robespierre and Le Bas were led off to the prisons along with their leader and idol.

It was now a little after four o'clock. The Convention, with the self-possession that so often amazes us in its proceedings, went on with formal business for another hour. At five they broke up. For life, as the poets tell, is a daily stage-play; men declaim their high heroic parts, then doff the buskin or the sock, wash away the paint from their cheeks, and gravely sit down to meat. The Conventionals, as they ate their dinners, were unconscious, apparently, that the crisis of the drama was still to come. The next twelve hours were to witness the climax. Robespierre had been crushed by the Convention; it remained to be seen whether the Convention would not now be crushed by the Commune of Paris.

Robespierre was first conducted to the prisons of the Luxembourg. The gaoler, on some plea of informality, refused to receive him. The terrible prisoner was next taken to the Mairie, where he remained among joyful friends from eight in the evening until eleven. Meanwhile the old insurrectionary methods of the nights of June and of August in 1792, of May and of June in 1793, were again followed. The beating of the *rappel* and the *générale* was heard in all the sections; the tocsin sounded its dreadful note, reminding

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all who should hear it that insurrection is the most sacred and indispensable of duties. Hanriot, the commandant of the forces, had been arrested in the evening, but he was speedily released by the agents of the Commune. The Council issued manifestoes and decrees from the Common Hall every moment. The barriers were closed. Cannon were posted opposite the doors of the hall of the Convention. The quays were thronged. Emissaries sped to and fro between the Jacobin Club and the Common Hall, and between these two centres and each of the forty-eight sections. It is one of the inscrutable mysteries of this delirious night, that Hanriot did not at once use the force at his command to break up the Convention. The members of the Convention had reassembled after their dinner, towards seven o'clock. The hall that had resounded with the shrieks and yells of the furious gladiators of the factions all day, now lent a lugubrious echo to gloomy reports which one member after another delivered from the shadow of the tribune. Towards nine o'clock the members of the two dread Committees came in panic to seek shelter among their colleagues, "as dejected in their peril," says an eye-witness, "as they had been cruel and insolent in the hour of their supremacy." When they heard that Hanriot had been released, and that guns were at their door, all gave themselves up for lost and made ready for death. News came that Robespierre had broken his arrest, and gone to the Common Hall. Robespierre, after urgent and repeated solicitations, had been at length persuaded about an hour before midnight to leave the Mairie and join his partisans of the Commune. This was an act of revolt against the Convention, for the Mairie was a legal place of detention, and so long as he was there, he was within the law. The Convention with heroic intrepidity declared both Hanriot

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and Robespierre beyond the pale of the law. This prompt measure was its salvation. Twelve members were instantly named to carry the decree to all the sections. With the scarf of office round their waists, and a sabre in hand, they sallied forth. Mounting horses, and escorted by attendants with flaring torches, they scoured Paris, calling all good citizens to the succour of the Convention, haranguing crowds at the street corners with power and authority, and striking the imagination of men. At midnight heavy rain began to fall.

The leaders of the Commune meanwhile, in full confidence that victory was sure, contented themselves with incessant issue of paper decrees, to each of which the Convention replied by a counter-decree. Those who have studied the situation most minutely are of opinion that even so late as one o'clock in the morning, the Commune might have made a successful defence, although it had lost the opportunity, that it had certainly possessed up to ten o'clock, of destroying the Convention. But on this occasion the genius of insurrection slumbered. And there was a genuine division of opinion in the eastern quarters of Paris, the result of a grim distrust of the man who had helped to slay Hébert and Chaumette. At a word this distrust began to declare itself. The opinion of the sections became more and more distracted. One armed group cried, *Down with the Convention!* Another armed group cried, *The Convention for ever, and down with the Commune!* The two great faubourgs were all astir, and three battalions were ready to march. Emissaries from the Convention actually succeeded in persuading them—such the dementia of the night—that Robespierre was a royalist agent, and that the Commune were about to deliver the little Louis from his prison in the Temple. One body of communist partisans after another was detached from its allegiance. The deluge of rain

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emptied the Place de Grève, and when companies came up from the sections in obedience to orders from Hanriot and the Commune, the silence made them suspect a trap, and they withdrew towards the great metropolitan church or elsewhere.

Barras, whom the Convention had charged with its military defence, gathered together some six thousand men. With the right instinct of a man who had studied the history of Paris since the July of 1789, he foresaw the advantage of being the first to make the attack. He arranged his forces into two divisions. One of them marched along the quays to take the Common Hall in front; the other along the rue Saint Honoré to take it in flank. Inside the Common Hall the staircases and corridors were alive with bustling messengers, and those mysterious busybodies who are always found lingering without a purpose on the skirts of great historic scenes. Robespierre and the other chiefs were in a small room, preparing manifestoes and signing decrees. They were curiously unaware of the movements of the Convention. An aggressive attack by the party of authority upon the party of insurrection was unknown in the tradition of revolt. They had an easy assurance that at day-break their forces would be prepared once more to tramp along the familiar road westwards. It was now half-past two. Robespierre had just signed the first two letters of his name to a document before him, when he was startled by cries and uproar in the Place below. In a few instants he lay stretched on the ground, his jaw shattered by a pistol-shot. His brother had either fallen or had leaped out of the window. Couthon was hurled over a staircase, and lay for dead. Saint-Just was a prisoner.

Whether Robespierre was shot by an officer of the Conventional force, or attempted to blow out his own brains, we shall never know, any more than

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we shall ever be quite assured how Rousseau, his spiritual master, came to an end. The wounded man was carried, a ghastly sight, first to the Committee of Public Safety, and then to the Conciergerie, where he lay in silent stupefaction through the heat of the summer day. As he was an outlaw, the only legal preliminary before execution was to identify him. At five in the afternoon, he was raised into the cart. Couthon and the younger Robespierre lay, confused wrecks of men, at the bottom of it. Hanriot and Saint-Just, bruised and begrimed, completed the band. One who walks from the Palace of Justice, over the bridge, along the rue Saint Honoré, into the rue Royale, and so to the Luxor column, retraces the *via dolorosa* of the Revolution on the afternoon of the Tenth of Thermidor.

The end of the intricate manœuvres known as the Revolution of Thermidor was the recovery of authority by the Convention. The insurrections, known as the days of the Twelfth Germinal, First Prairial, and Thirteenth Vendémiaire, all ended in the victory of the Convention over the revolutionary forces of Paris. The Committees, on the other hand, had beaten Robespierre, but they had ruined themselves. Very gradually the movement towards order, which had begun in the mind of Danton, and had gone on in the cloudy purposes of Robespierre, became definite. But it was in the interest of very different ideas from those of either Danton or of Robespierre. A White Terror slowly succeeded the Red Terror. Nine months after the death of Robespierre the reaction was strong enough to smite his colleagues of the two Committees. The surviving Girondins had come back to their seats in the Convention: the Dantonians had not forgiven the execution of their chief. These two parties were bent on vengeance. In April 1795, a

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decree was passed banishing Billaud-Varennes, Collot d'Herbois, and Barère. In the following month the leaders of the Committee of General Security were thrown into prison. The Revolution had passed into new currents. We cannot see any reasons for thinking that those currents would have led to any happier results if Robespierre had won the battle. Tallien, Fouché, Barras, and the rest may have been thoroughly bad men. But then what qualities had Robespierre for building up a state? He had neither strength of practical character, nor firm breadth of political judgment. When we compare him,—I do not say with Frederick of Prussia, with Jefferson, with Washington,—but with the group of able men who made the closing year of the Convention honourable and of good service to France, we have a measure of Robespierre's incompetence.

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VICTOR HUGO'S *NINETY-THREE*

"HISTORY has its truth, Legend has its truth. Legendary truth is of a different nature from historic truth. Legendary truth is invention with reality for result. For the rest, history and legend have the same aim — to paint under the man of a day eternal humanity." These words from his new and latest work (ii. 4)[1] are a repetition of what Victor Hugo had already said in the introduction to his memorable *Legend of the Ages*. But the occasion of their application is far more delicate. Poetry lends itself naturally to the spacious, distant, vague, highly generalised way of presenting real events. A prose romance, on the other hand, is of necessity abundant in details, in special circumstances, in particularities of time and place. This leaves all the more room for historic error, and historic error in a work of imagination dealing with actual and known occurrences is obviously fatal, not only to legendary truth, but to legendary beauty and poetic impressiveness. And then the pitfalls which lie about the feet of the Frenchman who has to speak of 1793, — the terrible year of the modern epoch! The delirium of the Terror haunts most of the revolutionary historians, and the choicest examples in all literature of bombast, folly, emptiness, political immorality, inhumanity, formal repudiation of common sense and judgment, are to be found in the rhapsodies which men of

[1] The references are to the *Édition Définitive* in two volumes.

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letters, some of them men of eminence, call histories of the Revolution, or lives of this or that actor in it.

It was hardly a breach, therefore, of one's allegiance to Hugo's imaginative genius, if one had misgivings as to the result of an attempt, even in his strong hands, to combine legend with truth on a disastrous field, in which grave writers with academic solemnity had confounded truth with the falsest kind of legend. The theme was so likely to emphasise the defects incident to his mighty qualities; so likely to provoke an exaggeration of those mannerisms of thought no less than of phrase, which, though never ignoble nor paltry, yet now and then take something from the loftiness and sincerity of the writer's work. Wisdom, however, is justified of her children, and Hugo's genius has justified his choice of a difficult and perilous subject. *Quatrevingt-treize* is a monument of its author's finest gifts; and while those who are happily endowed with the capacity of taking delight in nobility and beauty of imaginative work will find themselves in possession of a new treasure, the lover of historic truth who hates to see abstractions passed off for actualities and legend erected in the place of fact, escapes with his sensibilities almost unwounded.

The historic interlude at the beginning of the second volume is undoubtedly open to criticism from the political student's point of view. As a sketch of the Convention, the scene of its sittings, the stormful dramas that were enacted there one after another for month after month, the singular men who, one after another, rode triumphant upon the whirlwind for a space, and were then mercilessly swept in an instant into outer darkness; the commoner men who cowered before the fury of the storm, and were like "smoke driven hither and thither by the wind," and laboured hard upon a

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thousand schemes for human improvement, some admirable, others mere frenzy, while mobs filed in and danced mad carmagnoles before them—all this is a magnificent masterpiece of accurate, full, and vivid description. To the philosophy of it we venture to demur. The mystic, supernatural view of the French Revolution, that is so popular among French writers who object to the supernatural and the mystical everywhere else, is to us a thing incredible, most mischievous. People talk of '93, as a Greek tragedian treats the Tale of Troy divine, or the terrible fortunes of the house of Atreus, as the result of dark invincible fate, the unalterable decree of the immortal gods. Even Victor Hugo's strong spirit does not quite overcome the demoralising doctrine of a certain revolutionary school, though he has the poet's excuse. Thus, of the Convention :

Minds all a prey to the wind. But this wind was a wind of miracle and portent. To be a member of the Convention was to be a wave of the ocean. And this was true of its greatest. The force of impulsion came from on high. There was in the Convention a will, which was the will of all, and yet was the will of no one. It was an idea, an idea resistless and without measure, which breathed in the shadow from the high heavens. We call that the Revolution. As this idea passed, it threw down one and raised up another; it bore away this man in the foam, and broke that man to pieces upon the rocks. The idea knew whither it went, and drove the gulf of waters before it. To impute the Revolution to men is as one who should impute the tide to the waves. The Revolution is an action of the Unknown. . . . It is a form of the abiding phenomenon that shuts us in on every side and that we call Necessity. . . . In presence of these climacteric catastrophes which waste and vivify civilisation, one is slow to judge detail. To blame or praise men on account of the result, is as if one should blame or praise the figures on account of the total. That which must pass passes, the storm that must rage rages. The eternal serenity does not suffer from these boisterous winds. Above revolutions

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truth and justice abide, as the starry heaven abides above the tempests (i. 188-189).

As a lyric passage, full of the breath of inspiration; as history, superficial and untrue; as morality, enervating and antinomian. The author is assuredly far nearer the mark in another place when he speaks of "*that immense improvisation* which is the French Revolution" (ii. 35)—an improvisation of which every step can be rationally explained.

After all, this is no more than an interlude. Victor Hugo only surveys the events of '93 as a field for the growth of types of character. His instinct as artist takes him away from the Paris of '93, where the confusion, uproar, human frenzy, leave him no background of nature, with nature's fixity, sternness, indifference, sublimity. This background he found in La Vendée, whose vast forests grow under the pencil of the master of all the more terrible and majestic effects, into a picture hardly less sombre and mighty in its impressiveness than the memorable ocean pieces of his *Toilers of the Sea*. If the waves are appalling in their agitation, their thunders, their sterility, the forest is appalling in its silence, its dimness, its rest, and in the invisibleness of the thousand kinds of life to which it gives a shelter. If the violence and calm and mercilessness of the sea penetrated the earlier romance with transcendent fury, so does the stranger, more mysterious, and in a sense even more inhuman life of the forest penetrate its successor. From the opening chapter down to the very close, even while the interlude takes us for a little while to the Paris café where Danton, Robespierre, and Marat sit in angry counsel, even while we are on the sea with the royalist Marquis and Halmalo, the reader is subtly haunted by the great Vendean woods, their profundity, their mystery, their tragic and sinister beauties.

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The forest is barbarous.

The configuration of the land counsels man in many an act. More than we suppose, it is his accomplice. In the presence of certain savage landscapes, you are tempted to exonerate man and blame creation; you feel a silent challenge and incitement from nature; the desert is constantly unwholesome for conscience, especially for a conscience without light. Conscience may be a giant; that makes a Socrates or a Jesus: it may be a dwarf; that makes an Atreus or a Judas. The puny conscience soon turns reptile; the twilight thickets, the brambles, the thorns, the marsh waters under branches, make for it a fatal haunting place; amid all this it undergoes the mysterious infiltration of ill suggestions. The optical illusions, the unexplained images, the scaring hour, the scaring spot, all throw man into that kind of affright, half-religious, half-brutal, which in ordinary times engenders superstition, and in epochs of violence, savagery. Hallucinations hold the torch that lights the path to murder. There is something like vertigo in the brigand. Nature with her prodigies has a double effect; she dazzles great minds, and blinds the duller soul. When man is ignorant, when the desert offers visions, the obscurity of the solitude is added to the obscurity of the intelligence; thence in man comes the opening of abysses. Certain rocks, certain ravines, certain thickets, certain wild openings of the evening sky through the trees, drive man towards mad or monstrous exploits. We might almost call some places criminal (ii. 21).

With La Vendée for background, and some savage incidents of the bloody Vendean war for external machinery, Victor Hugo has realised his conception of '93 in three types of character: Lantenac, the royalist marquis; Cimourdain, the puritan turned Jacobin; and Gauvain, for whom one can as yet find no short name, he belonging to the millenarian times. Lantenac, though naturally a less original creation than the other two, is still a bold and striking figure, drawn with marked firmness of hand, and presenting a distinct and coherent conception. It is a triumph of the poetic or artistic part of the author's nature over

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the merely political part, that he should have made even his type of the old feudal order which he execrates so bitterly, a heroic, if ever so little also a diabolic, personage. There is everything that is cruel, merciless, unflinching, in Lantenac; there is nothing mean or insignificant. A gunner at sea, by inattention to the lashing of his gun, causes an accident that breaks the ship to pieces, and then he saves the lives of the crew by hazarding his own life to secure the wandering monster. Lantenac decorates him with the cross of Saint Louis for his gallantry, and instantly afterwards has him shot for his carelessness. He burns homesteads and villages, fusillades men and women, and makes the war a war without quarter or grace. Yet he is no swashbuckler of the melodramatic stage. There is a fine reserve, a brief gravity, in the delineation of him, his clear will, his quickness, his intrepidity, his relentlessness, that make of him the incarnation of aristocratic coldness, hatred, and pride. You might guillotine Lantenac with satisfaction, and yet he does not make us ashamed of mankind. Into his mouth, as he walks about his dungeon, impatiently waiting to be led out to execution, Victor Hugo has put the aristocrat's view of the Revolution. Some portions of it (ii. 224-226) would fit amazingly well into Renan's notions about the moral and intellectual reform of France.

If the Breton aristocrat of '93 was fearless, intrepid, and without mercy in defence of God and the king — and his qualities were all shared, the democrat may love to remember, by the Breton peasant, whether peasant follower or peasant leader—the Jacobin was just as vigorous, as intrepid, as merciless in defence of his Republic. "Pays, Patrie," says Victor Hugo, in words that perhaps will serve to describe many a future passage in French history, "ces deux mots résument toute la guerre de Vendée; querelle de l'idée locale contre

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l'idée universelle; paysans contre patriotes" (ii. 22).[1] Certainly the Jacobins were the patriots of that era, the deliverers of France from something like the process of partition that further east was consummated in this very '93. We do not mean the handful of odious miscreants who played fool and demon in turns in the insurrectionary Commune and elsewhere: such men as Collot d'Herbois, or Carrier, or Panis. The normal Jacobin was a remarkable type. He has been described by Louis Blanc as something powerful, original, sombre; half agitator, half statesman; half puritan, half monk; half inquisitor, half tribune. These words of the historian are the exact prose version of the figure of Cimourdain, the typical Jacobin of the poet. "Cimourdain was a pure conscience, but sombre. He had in him the absolute. He had been a priest, and that is a serious thing. Man, like the sky, may have a dark serenity; it is enough that something should have brought night into his soul. Priesthood had brought night into Cimourdain. He who has been a priest is one still. What brings night upon us may leave the stars with us. Cimourdain was full of virtues, full of truths, but they shone in the midst of darkness" (i. 123). If the aristocrat had rigidity, so had the Jacobin. "Cimourdain had the blind certitude of the arrow, that only sees the mark and makes for it. In revolution, nothing so formidable as the straight line. Cimourdain strode forward with fatality in his step. He believed that in social genesis the very extreme point must always be solid ground, an error peculiar to minds that for reason substitute logic" (i. 127). And so forth, until the character of the Jacobin lives for us with a precision, a fulness, a naturalness, such as neither Carlyle nor Michelet nor Quinet has been able to

[1] In corroboration of this view of the Vendean rising as democratic, see Mortimer-Ternaux, *Hist. de la Terreur*, vol. vi. bk. 30.

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clothe it with, though these too have the sacred illumination of genius. Victor Hugo's Jacobin is a poetic creation, yet the creation only lies in the vivid completeness with which the imagination of a great master has realised to itself the traits and life of an actual personality. It is not that he has any special love for his Jacobin, but that he has the poet's eye for types, politics apart. He sees how much the aristocrat, slaying hip and thigh for the king, and the Jacobin, slaying hip and thigh for the Republic, resembled one another. "Let us confess," he says, "these two men, the Marquis and the priest [Lantenac and Cimourdain], were up to a certain point the selfsame man. The bronze mask of civil war has two profiles, one turned towards the past, the other towards the future, but as tragic the one as the other. Lantenac was the first of these profiles, Cimourdain was the second; only the bitter rictus of Lantenac was covered with shadow and night, and on the fatal brow of Cimourdain was a gleam of the dawn" (ii. 91).

And let us mark Victor Hugo's signal distinction in his analysis of character. It is not mere vigour of drawing, nor acuteness of perception, nor fire of imagination, though he has all these gifts, and truest of their kind. But then Scott had them too, and yet we feel in Victor Hugo's work a seriousness, a significance, a depth of tone that never touches us in the work of his famous predecessor in romance, delightful as the best of that work is. Balfour of Burley is one of Scott's most commanding figures, and the stern Covenanter is nearly in the same plane of character as the stern Jacobin. Yet Cimourdain impresses us more profoundly. He is as natural, as human, as readily conceivable, and yet he produces something of the subtle depth of effect that belongs to the actor in a play of Aeschylus. Why is this? Because

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Hugo makes us conscious of the tragedy of temperament, the sterner Necessity of character, the resistless compulsion of circumstance, that is the modern and positive expression for the old Destiny of the Greeks, and in some expression or other is now an essential element in the highest presentation of human life. Here is not the Unknown. On the contrary, we are in the very heart of science; tragedy to the modern is not τύχη, but a thing of cause and effect, invariable antecedent and invariable consequent. It is the presence of this tragic force underlying action that gives to all Hugo's work its lofty quality, its breadth, and generality, and fills both it and us who read, with pity and gravity and an understanding awe.

The action is this. Cimourdain had the young Gauvain to train from its earliest childhood, and the pupil grew up with the same rigid sense of duty as the master, though temperament modified its form. When the Revolution came, Gauvain, though a noble, took sides with the people, but he was not of the same spirit as his teacher. "The Revolution," says Hugo, "by the side of youthful figures of giants, Danton, Saint-Just, and Robespierre, has young ideal figures, like Hoche and Marceau. Gauvain was one of these figures" (ii. 84). Cimourdain has himself named delegate from the Committee of Public Safety to the expeditionary column of which Gauvain is in command. The warmth of affection between them was undiminished, but difference in temperament bred difference in their principles. They represented, as the author says, the two poles of the truth; the two sides of the inarticulate, subterranean, fatal contention of the year of the Terror. Their arguments with one another make the situation more intelligible to the historic student, as they make the characters of the speakers more transparent for the romance.

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This is Cimourdain:

Beware, there are terrible duties in life. Do not accuse what is not responsible. Since when has the disorder been the fault of the physician? Yes, what marks this tremendous year is being without pity. Why? Because it is the great revolutionary year. This year incarnates the Revolution. The Revolution has an enemy, the old world, and to that it is pitiless, just as the surgeon has an enemy, gangrene, and is pitiless to that. The Revolution extirpates kingship in the king, aristocracy in the noble, despotism in the soldier, superstition in the priest, barbarity in the judge, in a word whatever is tyranny in whatever is tyrant. The operation is frightful, the Revolution performs it with a sure hand. As to the quantity of sound flesh that it requires, ask Boerhave what he thinks of it. What tumour that has to be cut out does not involve loss of blood? . . . The Revolution devotes itself to its fated task. It mutilates but it saves. . . . It has the past in its grasp, it will not spare. It makes in civilisation a deep incision whence shall come the safety of the human race. You suffer? No doubt. How long will it last? The time needed for the operation. Then you will live, etc. (ii. 65-66).

"One day," he adds, "the Revolution will justify the Terror." To which Gauvain retorts thus:

Fear lest the Terror be the calumny of the Revolution. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, are dogmas of peace and harmony. Why give them an aspect of alarm? What do we seek? To win nations to the universal public. Then why inspire fright? Of what avail is intimidation? It is wrong to do ill in order to do good. You do not pull down the throne to leave the scaffold standing. Let us hurl away crowns, let us spare heads. The Revolution is concord, not affright. Mild ideas are ill served by men who do not know pity. Amnesty is for me the noblest word in human speech. I will shed no blood save at hazard of my own. . . . In the fight let us be the enemies of our foes, and after the victory their brothers (ii. 67).

These two together, Cimourdain and Gauvain, make an ideal pair of the revolutionists of '93.

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Strip each of them of the beauty of character with which the poet's imagination has endowed them, add instead passion, violence, envy, egoism, malice; then you understand how in the very face of the foreign enemy Girondins sharpened the knife for the men of the Mountain, Hébertists screamed for the lives of Robespierrists, Robespierre struck off the head of Danton, Thermidorians crushed Robespierre.

Victor Hugo has given to this typic historical struggle of '93 the qualities of nobleness and beauty which art requires in dealing with real themes. Lantenac falls into the hands of the Blues, headed by Cimourdain and Gauvain, but he does so in consequence of yielding to a heroic and self-devoting impulse of humanity. Cimourdain, true to his temperament, insists on his instant execution. Gauvain, true also to his temperament, is seized with a thousand misgivings, and there is no more ample, original, and masterly presentation of a case of conscience, that in civil war always must be common enough, than the struggle through which Gauvain passes before he can resolve to deliver Lantenac. This pathetic debate — "the stone of Sisyphus, which is only the quarrel of man with himself"—turns on the loftiest, broadest, most generous motives, touching the very bases of character, and reaching far beyond the issue of '93. The political question is seen to be no more than a superficial aspect of a deeper moral question. Lantenac, the representative of the old order, had performed an exploit of signal devotion. Was it not well that one who had faith in the new order should show himself equally willing to cast away his life to save one whom self-sacrifice had transformed from the infernal Satan into the heavenly Lucifer?

Gauvain saw in the shade the sinister smile of the sphinx. The situation was a sort of dread crossway

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where the conflicting truths issued and confronted one another, and where the three supreme ideas of man stood face to face—humanity, the family, the fatherland. Each of the voices spoke in turn, and each in turn declared the truth. How choose? Each in turn seemed to hit the mark of reason and justice, and said, Do that. Was that the thing to be done? Yes. No. Reasoning counselled one thing; sentiment another; the two counsels were contradictory. Reasoning is only reason; sentiment is often conscience; the one comes from man, the other from a loftier source. That is why sentiment has less distinctness, and more might. Yet what strength in the severity of reason! Gauvain hesitated. His perplexity was so fierce. Two abysses opened before him: to destroy the marquis, or to save him. Which of these two gulfs was duty?

The whole scene (ii. 206-219) is a masterpiece of dramatic strength, sustention, and flexibility—only equalled by the dramatic vivacity of the scene in which Cimourdain, sitting as judge, orders the prisoner to be brought forward, to his horror sees Gauvain instead of Lantenac, and then condemns the man whom he loves best on earth to be taken to the guillotine.

The tragedy of the story, its sombre tone, the overhanging presence of death, are prevented from being oppressive by the variety of minor situation and subordinate character with which the central figures are surrounded. No writer living was so consummate a master of landscape, and besides the forest we here have an elaborate sea-piece, full of the weird, ineffable, menacing suggestion of the sea in some of her unnumbered moods; and there is a scene of late twilight on a high solitary down over the bay of Mont Saint Michel, to which a reader blessed with sensibility to the subtler impressions of landscape will turn again and again, as he visits some actual prospect where the eye procures for the inner sense a dream

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of beauty and the incommensurable. Perhaps the palm for exquisite workmanship will be popularly given, and justly, to the episode humorously headed *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, at the opening of the third volume. It is the story of three little children, barely out of infancy, awaking, playing, eating, wondering, slumbering, in solitude through a summer day in an old tower. As a rule the attempt to make infancy interesting in literature ends in failure. But at length the painters have found an equal, or more than an equal, in an artist whose medium lends itself less easily than colour and form to the reproduction of the beauty and life of childhood. In his poetry Victor Hugo had already shown his rare sensibility to the pathos of the beginnings of our life; witness *Chose vue un jour de printemps*, *Les Pauvres Gens*, the well-known pieces in *L'Année terrible*, and a hundred other lively touches and fragments of finished loveliness and penetrating sympathy. In prose it is a more difficult feat to collect the trivial details that make up the life of the tiny human animal into a whole that shall be impressive, finished, and beautiful. And prose can only describe by details enumerated one by one. This most arduous feat is accomplished in the children's summer day in the tower, and with enchanting success. Intensely realistic, yet the picture overflows with emotion—not the emotion of the mother, but of the poet. There is infinite tenderness, pathos, love, but all heightened at once and strengthened by the self-control of masculine force. A man writing about infants seems able to place himself outside, and thus to gain more calm and freedom of vision than the yearning of women permits to them in this field of art. Not a detail is spared, yet the whole is full of delight, pity, humour. Only one lyric passage is allowed to poetise and accentuate the realism of the description.

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Georgette, some twenty months old, scrambles from her cradle and prattles to the sunbeam.

What a bird says in its song, a child says in its prattle. 'Tis the same hymn; a hymn indistinct, lisping, profound. The child has what the bird has not, the sombre human destiny in front of it. Hence the sadness of men as they listen, mingling with the joy of the little one as it sings. The sublimest canticle to be heard on earth is the stammering of the human soul on the lips of infancy. The confused chirruping of a thought, that is as yet no more than an instinct, has in it one knows not what sort of artless appeal to eternal justice; or is it a protest uttered on the threshold before entering, a protest meek and poignant? This ignorance, smiling at the Infinite, compromises all creation in the lot that shall fall to the weak defenceless being. Ill, if it shall come, will be an abuse of confidence.

The child's murmur is more and is less than words; there are no notes, and yet it is a song; there are no syllables, and yet it is language. . . . This poor stammering is a compound of what the child said when it was an angel, and of what it will say when it becomes a man. The cradle has a Yesterday as the grave has a Morrow; in that strange cooing the Morrow and the Yesterday mingle their twofold mystery. . . .

Her lips smiled, her eyes smiled, the dimples in her cheeks smiled. There came forth in this smile a mysterious welcome of the morning. The soul has faith in the ray. The heavens were blue, warm was the air. The fragile creature, without knowing or recognising, or understanding anything, softly afloat in musings that are not thought, felt itself safe in the midst of nature, among those friendly trees and that guileless greenery, in the pure and peaceful landscape, amid the rustle of nests, of flowing springs, of insects, of leaves, while over all there glowed the great innocency of the sun (ii. 104).

As an eminent man has written about Wordsworth's most famous Ode, there may be some bad philosophy here, but there is assuredly noble and touching poetry.

If the carelessness of infancy is caught with this perfection of finish, there is a tragic companion piece in the horror and gnawing anguish of the

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wretched woman from whom her young have been taken—her rescue from death, her fierce yearnings for them like the yearnings of a beast, her brute-like heedlessness of her life and her body in the cruel search.

So the poet conducts us along the strange excursive windings of the life and passion of humanity. The same hand that draws such noble figures as Gauvain—and the real Lanjuinais of history was fully as heroic and noble as the imaginary Gauvain of fiction—is equally skilful in drawing the wild Breton beggar who dwells underground among the branching tree-roots; the monstrous Imânus, the barbarous retainer of the Lord of the Seven Forests; Radoub, the sergeant from Paris, a man of hearty oaths, hideous, heroic, humoursome, of a bloody ingenuity in combat. And the same hand that described the silent sundown on the sandy shore of the bay, and the mysterious darkness of the forests, and the blameless play of the little ones, gives us the prodigious animation of the night surprise at Dôl, the furious conflict at La Tourgue, and, perhaps most powerful of all, the breaking loose of the gun on the deck of the *Claymore*. You may say that this is only melodrama; but if we turn to the actual events of '93, the melodrama of the romancer will seem but tame compared with the melodrama of the faithful chronicler. And so long as the narrative of melodramatic action is filled with poetry and beauty, there is no reproach in uncommon situation, in intense passion, in magnanimous or subtle motives that are not of every day. Of Hugo's art we may say what Newman has said of something else: *Such work is always open to criticism and it is always above it.*

There is poetry and beauty, sure enough, in the common lives about us, if we look at them with imaginative and sympathetic eye, and we owe much to the art that reveals to us the tragedy of

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the parlour and the frock-coat, and analyses the bitterness and sorrow and high passion that may underlie a life of outer smoothness and decorum. Still, no criticism will accept this as the final and exclusive limitation of imaginative work. Art is nothing if not catholic and many-sided, and it is certainly not exhausted by mere domestic possibilities. Goethe's fine, luminous feeling for practical life, that has given such depth of richness and wisdom to his best prose writing, fills us with a delightful sense of satisfaction and of what is adequate; and yet why should it not leave us with a mind eagerly open for the larger and more inventive romance, in which nature is clothed with some of the awe and might and silent contemplation of the puny destinies of man, that used to surround the conception of the supernatural? Hugo seeks strong and extraordinary effects; he is a master of terrible image, profound emotion, audacious fancy; but then these are as real, as natural, as true to fact, as the fairest reproduction of the moral poverties of the world. Let it be added that while he is without a rival in the dark mysterious heights of imaginative effect, he is equally a master in strokes of tenderness and all that is most delicate in human sympathy. *Ninety-Three* seems to contain pieces that surpass every other book of Hugo's in the latter range of qualities, and not to fall at all short in the former. And so, in the words of the man of genius recently writing on Victor Hugo,[1] "As we pity ourselves for the loss of poems and pictures which have perished, and left of Sappho but a fragment and of Zeuxis but a name, so are we inclined to pity the dead who died too soon to enjoy the great works we have enjoyed. At each new glory that 'swims into our ken,' we surely feel that it is something to have lived to see that too rise."

[1] Swinburne.

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FRANCE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY[1]

THE announcement that one of the most ingenious and accomplished men of letters in Europe was engaged upon a history of the French Revolution, raised some doubts among those who have thought most about the qualifications proper to the historian. M. Taine has the quality of the best type of a man of letters; he has the fine critical aptitude for seizing the secret of an author's or an artist's manner, for penetrating to dominant and central ideas, for marking the abstract and general under accidental forms in which they are concealed, for connecting the achievements of literature and art with facts of society and impulses of human character and life. He is the master of a style which, if it seems to lack the breadth, the firmness, the sustained and level strength of great writing, is yet always energetic, and fresh, and alive with that spontaneous reality and independence of interest which distinguishes the genuine writer from the mere weaver of sentences and the servile mechanic of the pen. The matter and form alike of M. Taine's best work—and we say best, for his work is not without degrees and inequalities of worth—prove that he has not shrunk from the toil and austerity of the student, from that scorn

[1] *Les Origines de la France contemporaine.* Tom. i. *L'Ancien Régime.* Par H. Taine. Paris: Hachette. 1876.

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of delight and living of laborious days, by which only can men either get command of the art of just and finished expression, or gather to themselves much knowledge.

But with all its attractiveness and high uses of its own, the genius for literature in its proper sense is distinct from the genius for political history. The discipline is different, because the matter is different. To criticise Rousseau's *Social Contract* requires one set of attainments, and to judge the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly or the Convention requires a set of quite different attainments. A man may have the keenest sense of the filiation of ideas, of their scope and purport, and yet have a very dull or uninteresting eye for the play of material forces, the wayward tides of great gatherings of men, the rude and awkward methods that sometimes go to the attainment of wise political ends.

It would perhaps not be too bold to lay down this proposition; that no good social history has ever been written by a man who has not either himself taken a more or less active part in public affairs, or else been an habitual intimate of persons who were taking such a part on a considerable scale. Everybody knows what Gibbon said about the advantage to the historian of the Roman Empire of having been a member of the English Parliament and a captain in the Hampshire grenadiers. Thucydides commanded an Athenian squadron, and Tacitus filled the offices of praetor and consul. Xenophon, Polybius, and Sallust were all men of affairs and public adventure. Guicciardini was an ambassador, a ruler, and the counsellor of rulers; and Machiavel was all these things and more. Voltaire was the keen-eyed friend of the greatest princes and statesmen of his time, and was more than once engaged in diplomatic transactions. Robertson was a powerful

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party chief in the Assembly of the Scotch Church. Grote and Macaulay were active members of parliament, and Hallam and Milman were confidential members of circles where affairs of state were the staple of daily discussion among the men who were responsible for conducting them to successful issues. Guizot was a prime minister, Finlay was a farmer of the Greek revenue. The most learned of contemporary English historians a few years ago was twice pressed to contest a county, and was habitually inspired in his researches into the past by his interest in the politics of the present. The German historians, whose gifts in reconstructing the past are so valuable and so singular, have for the most part been as actively interested in the public movements of to-day, as in those of any century before or since the Christian era. Niebuhr held more than one political post of dignity and importance; and of historical writers in our time, one has sat in several Prussian parliaments; another, once the tutor of a Prussian prince, has lived in the atmosphere of high politics; while all the best of them have taken their share in the preparation of the political spirit and ideas that have restored Germany to all the fulness and exaltation of national life.

It is hardly necessary to extend the list. It is indeed plain on the least reflection that close contact with political business, however modest in its pretensions, is the best possible element in the training of any one who aspires to understand and reproduce political history. Political preparation is as necessary as literary preparation. There is no necessity that the business should be on any majestic and imperial scale. To be a guardian of the poor in an East-End parish, to be behind the scenes of some great strike of labour, to be an active member of the parliamentary committee of a Trades Council or of the executive committee of

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a Union or a League, may be quite as instructive discipline as participation in mightier scenes. Those who write concrete history, without ever having taken part in practical politics, are, one might say, in the position of those ancients who wrote about the human body without ever having effectively explored it by dissection. Carlyle, it is true, by force of penetrating imaginative genius, has reproduced in stirring and resplendent dithyrambs the fire and passion, the rage and tears, the many-tinted dawn and the blood-red sunset of the French Revolution; and the more a man learns about the details of the Revolution, the greater is his admiration for Carlyle's magnificent performance. But it is dramatic presentation, not social analysis; a masterpiece of literature, not a scientific investigation; a prodigy of poetic insight, not a sane and quantitative exploration of the complex processes, the deep-lying economical, fiscal, and political conditions, that prepared so immense an explosion.

We have to remember, it is true, that M. Taine is not professing to write a history in the ordinary sense. His book lies, if we may use two very pompous but indispensable words, partly in the region of historiography, but much more in the region of sociology. The study of the French Revolution cannot yet be a history of the past, for the French still walk *per ignes suppositos*, and the Revolution is still some way from being fully accomplished. It was the disputes between the Roman and the Reformed churches which inspired historical research in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; it is the disputes among French parties that now inspire what professes to be historiography, but what is really a sort of experimental investigation in the science of society. They little know how long and weary a journey lies before them, said Burke, who undertake to

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bring great masses of men into the political unity of a nation. The process is still going on, and a man of M. Taine's lively intellectual sensibility can no more escape its influences than he can escape the ingredients of the air he breathes. We may add that if his work has been really historic, he must inevitably have gone further back than the eighteenth century for the "Origins" of contemporary France. The very slight, vague, and unsubstantial chapter with which he opens his work cannot be accepted as a substitute for what the subject really demanded — a serious summary, however condensed and rapid, of the various forces, accidents, deliberate lines of policy, which, from the breaking up of the great fiefs down to the death of Louis the Fourteenth, had prepared the distractions of the monarchy under Louis's descendants.

Full of interest as it is, M. Taine's book can hardly be described as containing much that is new or strikingly significant. He develops one idea, indeed, which we have never before seen stated in its present form, but which, if it implies more than has been often advanced by previous writers in other forms, cannot be accepted as true. This is perhaps a point better worth discussing than any other which his book raises. The rest is a very elaborate and thorough description of the structure of society, of its physiognomy in manners and characteristics, the privileges, the burdens, the daily walk and conversation of the various classes which made up the French people between the Regency and the Revolution. M. Taine's method of description does not strike one as altogether happy. It is a common complaint against French historians that they are too lax about their authorities, and too heedless about giving us chapter and verse for their assertions. M. Taine goes to the contrary extreme, and pours

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his note-books into his text with a steady-handed profusion that is excessively fatiguing, and makes the result far less effective than it would have been if all this industrious reading had been thoroughly fused and recast into a homogeneous whole. It is an ungenerous trick of criticism to disparage good work by comparing it with better; but the reader can scarcely help contrasting M. Taine's overcrowded pages with the perfect assimilation, the pithy fulness, the pregnant meditation, of De Tocqueville's book on the same subject. When we attempt to reduce M. Taine's chapters to a body of propositions standing out in definite relief from one another, yet conveying a certain unity of interpretation, we soon feel how possible it is for an author to have literary clearness along with historic obscurity.

In another respect we are inclined to question the felicity of M. Taine's method. It does not convey the impression of movement. The steps and changes in the conflict among the organs of the old society are not marked in their order and succession. The reader is not kept alive to the gradual progress of the break-up of old institutions and ideas. The sense of an active and ceaseless struggle, extending in various stages across the century, is effaced by an exclusive attention to the social details of a given phase. We need the story. You cannot effectively reproduce the true sense and significance of such an epoch as the eighteenth century in France, without telling us, however barely, the tale, for example, of the long battle of the ecclesiastical factions, and the yet more important series of battles between the judiciary and the crown. If M. Taine's book were a piece of abstract social analysis, the above remark would not be true. But it is a study of the concrete facts of French life and society, and to make such a study effective, the element of

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the chronicle, as in Lacretelle or Jobez, cannot rightly be dispensed with.

Let us proceed to the chief thesis of the book. The new formula in which M. Taine describes the source of all the mischiefs of the revolutionary doctrine is this. "When we see a man," he says, "who is rather weak in constitution, but apparently sound and of peaceful habits, drink eagerly of a new liquor, then suddenly fall to the ground, foaming at the mouth, delirious and convulsed, we have no hesitation in supposing that in the pleasant draught there was some dangerous ingredient; but we need a delicate analysis in order to decompose and isolate the poison. There is one in the philosophy of the eighteenth century, as curious as it was potent: for not only is it the product of a long historic elaboration, the final and condensed extract in which the whole thought of the century ends; but more than that, its two principal elements are peculiar in this, that when separated they are each of them salutary, yet in combination they produce a poisonous compound." These two ingredients are, first, the great and important acquisitions of the eighteenth century in the domain of physical science; second, the fixed classic form of the French intelligence. "It is the classic spirit which, being applied to the scientific acquisitions of the time, produced the philosophy of the century and the doctrines of the Revolution." This classic spirit has in its literary form one or two well-known marks. It leads, for instance, to the fastidious exclusion of particulars, whether in phrases, objects, or traits of character, and substitutes for them the general, the vague, the typic. Systematic arrangement orders the whole structure and composition from the period to the paragraph, from the paragraph to the structural series of paragraphs; it dictates

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the style as it has fixed the syntax. Its great note is the absolute. Again, "two principal operations make up the work of the human intelligence: placed in face of things, it receives the impression of them more or less exactly, completely, and profoundly; next, leaving the things, it decomposes its impression, and classifies, distributes, and expresses more or less skilfully the ideas that it draws from that impression. In the second of these processes the classic is superior." Classicism is only the organ of a certain reason, the *raison raisonnante*; that which insists upon thinking with as little preparation and as much ease as possible; which is contented with what it has acquired, and takes no thought about augmenting or renewing it; which either cannot or will not embrace the plenitude and the complexity of things as they are.

As an analysis of the classic spirit in French literature, nothing can be more ingenious and happy than these pages (p. 241, etc.). But, after all, classic is only the literary form preferred by a certain turn of intelligence; and we shall do well to call that turn of intelligence by a general name, that shall comprehend not only its literary form but its operations in every other field. And accordingly at the end of this very chapter we find M. Taine driven straightway to change classic for mathematic in describing the method of the new learning. And the latter description is much better, for it goes beneath the surface of literary expression, important as that is, down to the methods of reasoning. It leads us to the root of the matter, to the deductive habits of the French thinkers. The mischief of the later speculation of the eighteenth century in France was that men argued about the complex, conditional, and relative propositions of society, as if they had been theorems and problems of Euclid. And M. Taine

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himself is, as we say, compelled to change his term when he comes to the actual facts and personages of the revolutionary epoch. It was the geometric, rather than the classic, quality of political reasoning, which introduced so much that we now know to have been untrue and mischievous.

Even in literary history it is surely nearer the truth to say of the latter half of the century that the revolutionary movement began with the break-up of classic form and the gradual dissolution of the classic spirit. Indeed this is such a commonplace of criticism, that we can only treat M. Taine's inversion of it as a not very happy paradox. It was in literature that this genius of innovation, which afterwards extended over the whole social structure, showed itself first of all. Rousseau, not merely in the judgment of a foreigner like myself, but in that of the very highest of all native authorities, Sainte-Beuve, effected the greatest revolution that the French tongue had undergone since Pascal. And this revolution was more remarkable for nothing than for its repudiation of nearly all the notes of classicism that are enumerated by M. Taine. Diderot, again, in every page of his work, whether he is discussing painting, manners, science, the drama, poetry, or philosophy, abounds and overabounds in those details, particularities, and special marks of the individual, which are, as M. Taine rightly says, alien to the classic genius. Both Rousseau and Diderot, considered as men of letters, were conscious literary revolutionists, before they were used as half-conscious social revolutionists. They deliberately put away from them the entire classic tradition as to the dignity of personage proper to art, and the symmetry and fixed method proper to artistic style. This was why Voltaire, who was a son of the seventeenth century before he was the patriarchal sire of the eighteenth, could never

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thoroughly understand the author of the *New Heloïsa*, or the author of the *Père de famille* and *Jacques le fataliste*. Such work was to him for the most part a detestable compound of vulgarity and rodomontade. "There is nothing living in the eighteenth century," M. Taine says, "but the little sketches that are stitched in by the way and as if they were contraband, by Voltaire, and five or six portraits like Turcaret, Gil Blas, Marianne, Manon Lescaut, Rameau's Nephew, Figaro, two or three hasty sketches of Crébillon the younger and Collé" (p. 258). Nothing living but this! But this is much and very much. We do not pretend to compare the authors of these admirable delineations with Molière and La Bruyère in profundity of insight or in grasp and ethical mastery, but they are certainly altogether in a new vein even from those two great writers, when we speak of the familiar, the real, and the particular, as distinguished from old classic generality. And, we may add in passing, that the social life of France from the death of Louis XIV. downwards was emancipated all round from the formality and precision of the classic time. As M. Taine himself shows in many amusing pages, life was singularly gay, free, sociable, and varied. The literature of the time was sure to reflect, and does reflect, this universal rejection of the restraints of the past age when the classic spirit had been supreme.

Apart from this kind of objection to its exact expression, let us look at the substance of M. Taine's dictum. "It was the classic spirit, which, when applied to the scientific acquisitions of the time, produced the philosophy of the century and the doctrines of the Revolution." Even if we substitute geometric or deductive spirit for classic spirit, the proposition remains nearly as unsatisfactory. What were the doctrines of the Revolution? The sovereignty of the people,

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rights of man, liberty, equality, fraternity, progress and perfectibility of the species — these were the main articles of the new creed. M. Taine, like too many French writers, writes as if these ideas had never been heard of before 1789. Yet the most important and decisive of them were at least as old as the Reformation, were not peculiarly French in any sense, and were no more the special products of the classic spirit mixing with scientific acquisitions than they were the products of Manicheanism. It is extraordinary that a writer who attributes so much importance to Rousseau, and who gives us so ample an account of his political ideas, should not have traced these ideas to their source, nor even told us that they had a source wholly outside of France. Rousseau was a Protestant; he was a native of the very capital and mother city of Protestantism, militant and democratic; and he was penetrated to his heart's core by the political ideas which had arisen in Europe at the Reformation. There is not a single principle in the *Social Contract* which may not be found either in Hobbes, or in Locke, or in Althusen, any more than there is a single proposition of his deism which was not in the air of Geneva when he drew his Savoyard Vicar. If this be the case, what becomes of the position that the revolutionary philosophy was worked out by the *raison raisonnante*, which is the special faculty of a country saturated with the classic spirit? If we must have a formula, it would be nearer the truth to say that the doctrines of the Revolution were the product, not of the classic spirit applied to scientific acquisitions, but, first, of the democratic ideas of the Protestant Reformation, and then of the fictions of the lawyers, both of them allied with certain urgent social and political necessities.

So much, then, for the political side of the "philosophy of the century," if we are to use this

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too comprehensive expression for all the products of a very complex and many-sided outburst of speculative energy. Apart from its political side, we find M. Taine's formula no less unsatisfactory for its other phases. He seems to us not to go back nearly far enough in his search for the intellectual origins, any more than for the political origins, of his contemporary France. He has taken no account of the progress of the spirit of Scepticism from Montaigne's time, nor of the decisive influence of Montaigne on the revolutionary thinkers. Yet the extraordinary excitement aroused in France by Bayle's *Dictionary* was a proof of the extent to which the sceptical spirit had spread before the Encyclopaedists were born. The great influence of Fontenelle was wholly in the same sceptical direction. There was a strong sceptical element in French Materialism, even when materialism was fully developed and seemed most dogmatic.[1] Indeed, it may sometimes occur to the student of such a man as Diderot to wonder how far materialism in France was only seized upon as a means of making scepticism both serious and philosophic. For its turn for scepticism is at least as much a distinction of the French intelligence as its turn for classicism. And, once more, if we must have a formula, it would be best to say that the philosophy of the century was the product, first of scepticism applied to old beliefs which were no longer easily tenable, and then of scepticism extended to old institutions that were no longer practically habitable.

And this brings us to the cardinal reason for demurring to M. Taine's neatly rounded proposition. His appreciation of the speculative precursors of the Revolution seems to us to miss the decisive truth about them. He falls precisely into those errors of the *raison raisonnante*, about which, in his description of the intellectual preparation of

[1] See Lange's *Geschichte des Materialismus*, i. 298.

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the great overthrow, he has said so many just and acute things. Nothing can be more really admirable than M. Taine's criticism upon Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, as great masters of language (pp. 339-361). All this is marked by an amplitude of handling, a variety of approach, a subtlety of perception, a fulness of comprehension, which give a very different notion of M. Taine's critical soundness and power from any that one could have got from his account elsewhere of our English writers. Some of the remarks are open to criticism, as might be expected. It is hard to accept the saying (p. 278) that Montesquieu's "celebrity was not an influence." It was Montesquieu, after all, who first introduced among the encyclopaedic band a rationalistic and experiential conception of the various legal and other conditions of the social union, as distinguished from the old theological explanation of them. The correspondence of Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, D'Alembert, is sufficient to show how immediately, as well as how powerfully, they were influenced by Montesquieu's memorable book. Again, it is surely going too far to say that Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* contained every important idea of the century. Does it, for instance, contain that thrice fruitful idea which Turgot developed in 1750, of all the ages being linked together by an ordered succession of causes and effects? These and other objections, however, hardly affect the brilliance and substantial excellence of all this part of the book. It is when he proceeds to estimate these great men, not as writers but as social forces, not as stylists but as apostles, that M. Taine discloses the characteristic weaknesses of the bookman in dealing with the facts of concrete sociology. He shows none of this weakness in what he says of the remote past. On the contrary, he blames, as we have

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all blamed, Voltaire, Rousseau, and the rest of the group, for their failure to recognise that the founders of religions satisfied a profound need in those who accepted them, and that this acceptance was the spontaneous admission of their relative fitness. It would be impossible to state this important truth better than M. Taine has done in the following passage:

"At certain critical moments in history," he says, "men have come out from the narrow and confined track of their daily life and seized in one wide vision the infinite universe; the august face of eternal nature is suddenly unveiled before them; in the sublimity of their emotion they seem to perceive the very principle of its being; and at least they did discern some of its features. By an admirable stroke of circumstance, these features were precisely the only ones that their age, their race, a group of races, a fraction of humanity, happened to be in a condition to understand. Their point of view was the only one under which the multitudes beneath could place themselves. For millions of men, for hundreds of generations, the one access to divine things was along their path. They pronounced the unique word, heroic or tender, enthusiastic or tranquillising; the only word that, around them and after them, the heart and the intelligence would consent to hearken to; the only one adapted to the deep-growing wants, the long-gathered aspirations, the hereditary faculties, a whole moral and mental structure,—here to that of the Hindu or the Mongol, there to that of the Semite or the European, in our Europe to that of the German, the Latin, or the Slav; in such a way that its very contradictions, instead of condemning it, were exactly what justified it, since its diversity produced its adaptation, and its adaptation produced its benefits" (p. 272).

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It is extraordinary that a thinker who could so clearly discern the secret of the great spiritual movements of human history should fail to perceive that the same law governs and explains all the minor movements in which wide communities have been suddenly agitated by the word of a teacher. It is well — as no one would be more likely to contend than myself, who have attempted the task — to demonstrate the contradictions, the superficiality, the inadequateness, of the teaching of Rousseau, Voltaire, or Diderot. But it is well also, and in a historical student it is not only well, but the very pith and marrow of criticism, to search for that "adaptation," to use M. Taine's very proper expression, which gave to the word of these teachers its mighty power and far-spreading acceptance. Is it not as true of Rousseau and Voltaire, acting in a small society, as it is of Buddha or Mahomet acting on vast groups of races, that "leur point de vue était le seul auquel les multitudes échelonnées au-dessous d'eux pouvaient se mettre"? Did not they too seize, "by a happy stroke of circumstance," exactly those traits in the social union, in the resources of human nature, in its deep-seated aspirations, which their generation was in a condition to comprehend,—liberty, equality, fraternity, progress, justice, tolerance?

M. Taine shows, as so many others have shown before him, that the *Social Contract*, when held up in the light of true political science, is very poor stuff. Undoubtedly it is so. And Quintilian—an accomplished and ingenious Taine of the first century—would have thought the Gospels and Epistles, and Augustine and Jerome and Chrysostom, very poor stuff, compared with the

> Mellifluous streams that watered all the schools
> Of Academics old and new, with those
> Surnamed Peripatetics, and the Sect
> Epicurean, and the Stoic severe.

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And in some ways, from a literary or logical point of view, the early Christian writers could ill bear this comparison. But great bodies of men, in ages of trouble and confusion, have an instinctive feeling for the fragment of truth which they happen to need at the hour. They have a spontaneous apprehension of the formula which is at once the expression of their miseries and the mirror of their hope. The guiding force in the great changes of the world has not been the formal logic of the schools or of literature, but the practical logic of social convenience. Men take as much of a teacher's doctrine as meets their real wants: the rest they leave. The Jacobins accepted Rousseau's ideas about the sovereignty of the people, but they seasonably forgot his glorification of the state of nature and his denunciations of civilisation and progress. The American revolutionists cheerfully borrowed the doctrine that all men are born free and equal, but they kept their slaves.

It was for no lack of competition that the ideas of the *Social Contract*, of Raynal's *History of the two Indies*, of the *System of Nature*, of the *Philosophical Dictionary*, made such astounding and triumphant way in men's minds. There was Montesquieu with a sort of historic method. There was Turgot, and the school of the economists. There were seventy thousand of the secular clergy, and sixty thousand of the regular clergy, ever proclaiming by life or exhortation ideas of peace, submission, and a kingdom not of this world. Why did men turn their backs on these and all else, and betake themselves to revolutionary ideas? How came those ideas to rise up and fill the whole air? The answer is that, with all their contradiction, shallowness, and danger, such ideas fitted the crisis. They were seized by virtue of an instinct of national self-preservation. The evil elements in them worked themselves out in infinite

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mischief. The true elements in them saved France, by firing men with social hope and patriotic faith.

How was it, M. Taine rightly asks, that the philosophy of the eighteenth century, which was born in England and thence sent its shoots to France, dried up in the one country, and grew to overshadow the earth in the other? Because, he answers, the new seed fell upon ground that was suited to it, the home of the classic spirit, the country of *raison raisonnante*. Compare with this merely literary solution the answer given to the same question by De Tocqueville: "It was no accident that the philosophers of the eighteenth century generally conceived notions so opposed to those which still served as the base of the society of their time; *these ideas had actually been suggested to them by the very sight of that society, which they had ever before their eyes*" (*Ancien Régime*, 206). This is the exact truth and the whole truth. The greatest enterprise achieved by the men of letters in the period of intellectual preparation was the Encyclopaedia; and I have elsewhere tried to present what seemed to be ample evidence that the spirit and aim of that great undertaking were social, and that its conductors, while delivering their testimony in favour of the experiential conception of life in all its aspects, and while reproducing triumphantly the most recent acquisitions of science, had still the keenest and most direct eye for the abuses and injustice, the waste and disorder, of the social institutions around them. The answer, then, which we should venture to give to M. Taine's question would be much simpler than his. The philosophy of the eighteenth century fared differently in England and in France, because its ideas did not fit in with the economic and political conditions of the one, while, on the contrary, they were actively warmed and fostered by those of the other. It was not a literary

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aptitude in the nation for *raison raisonnante* which developed the political theories of Rousseau, the moral and psychological theories of Diderot, the anti-ecclesiastical theories of Voltaire and Holbach. It was the profound disorganisation of institutions that suggested and stimulated the speculative agitation. "The nation," wrote the wise and far-seeing Turgot, "has no constitution; it is a society composed of different orders ill assorted, and of a people whose members have few social bonds with one another; where consequently scarcely any one is occupied with anything beyond his private interest exclusively," and so forth.[1] Any student, uncommitted to a theory, who examines in close detail the wise aims and just and conservative methods of Turgot, and the circumstances of his utter rout after a short experiment of twenty months of power, will rise from that deplorable episode with the conviction that a pacific renovation of France, an orderly readjustment of her institutions, was hopelessly impossible. "*Si l'on avait été sage!*" those cry who consider the Revolution as a futile mutiny. If people had only been prudent, all would have been accomplished that has been accomplished since, and without the sanguinary memories, the constant interpolations of despotism, the waste of generous lives and noble purpose. And this is true. But then prudence itself was impossible. The court and the courtiers were smitten through the working of long tradition by judicial blindness. If Louis XVI. had been a Frederick, or Marie Antoinette had been a Catherine of Russia, or the nobles had even been stout-hearted gentlemen like our Cavaliers, the great transformation might then have been gradually effected without disorder. But they were none of these, and it was their characters that made the fate and doom of the situation. As for the court, Vergennes used

[1] *Œuvres*, ii. 504.

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an expression which suggests the very keyword of the situation. He had been ambassador in Turkey, and was fond of declaring that he had learnt in the seraglio how to brave the storms of Versailles. Versailles was like Stamboul or Teheran, oriental in etiquette, oriental in destruction of wealth and capital, oriental in antipathy to a reforming grand vizier. It was the queen, as we now know by incontestable evidence, who persuaded the king to dismiss Turgot, merely to satisfy some contemptible personal resentments of herself and her creatures.[1] And it was not in Turgot's case only that this ineptitude wrought mischief. In June 1789 Necker was overruled in the wisest elements of his policy and sent into exile by the violent intervention of the same court faction, headed by the same queen, who had procured the dismissal of Turgot thirteen years earlier. And it was one long tale throughout, from the first hour of the reign down to those last hours at the Tuileries in August 1792; one long tale of intrigue, perversity, and wilful, incorrigible infatuation.

Nor was the queen only to blame. Turgot, says an impartial eye-witness — Creutz, the Swedish ambassador—is a mark for the most formidable league possible, composed of all the great people in the kingdom, all the parliaments, all the finance, all the women of the court, and all the bigots. It was morally impossible that the reforms of any Turgot could have been acquiesced in by that emasculated caste, who showed their quality a few years after his dismissal by flying across the frontier at the first breath of personal danger. "When the gentlemen rejoiced so boisterously over the fall of Turgot, their applause was blind; on that day they threw away, and in a manner that was irreparable, the opportunity that was offered them of being born again to political life, and changing

[1] *Corr. entre Marie Thérèse et le Comte Mercy-Argenteau*, vol. iii.

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the state-candlestick of the royal household for the influence of a preponderant class. The nobility, defeated on the field of feudal privilege, would have risen again by the influence of an assembly where they would have taken the foremost place; by defending the interests of all, by becoming in their turn the ally of the third estate, which had hitherto fought on the side of the kings, they would have repaired the unbroken succession of defeats that had been inflicted on them since Louis the Fat." [1] It would be easy to name half-a-dozen patricians like the Duke d'Ayen, of exceptional public spirit and capacity, but a proud order cannot at the first exigency of a crisis change its traditional front, and abandon the maxims of centuries in a day. As has been said more than once, the oriental policy of the crown towards the nobles had the inevitable effect of cutting them off from all opportunity of acquiring in experience those habits of political wisdom which have saved the territorial aristocracy of our own country. The English nobles in the eighteenth century had become, what they mostly are now, men of business; agriculturists at least as much as politicians; land agents of a very dignified kind, with very large incomes. Sully designed to raise a working agricultural aristocracy, and Colbert to raise a working commercial aristocracy. But the statesman cannot create or mould a social order at will. Perhaps one reason why the English aristocracy became a truly agricultural body in the eighteenth century was the circumstance that many of the great landowning magnates were Tories, and remained sulking on their estates rather than go to the court of the first two kings of the Hanoverian line; just as the dependence of these two sovereigns of revolutionary title upon the revolution families is one reason why English liberties had time to root themselves

[1] *Turgot, philosophe et économiste.* Par A. Batbie, p. 380.

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thoroughly before the monarchical reaction under George III. In France, for reasons which we have no room to expatiate upon, the experiments both of Sully and of Colbert failed. The result may be read with graphic effect in the pages of Arthur Young, both before the Revolution broke out and again after Burke's superb rhetoric had biassed English opinion against it.

M. Léonce de Lavergne, it is true, in his most interesting book upon the Provincial Assemblies under Louis XVI., has endeavoured to show that in the great work of administrative reform all classes between 1778 and 1787 had shown themselves full of a liberal and practical spirit. But even in his pages we see enough of apprehensions and dissensions to perceive how deep was the intestine disorganisation; and the attitude of the nobles in 1789 demonstrated how incurable it was by any merely constitutional modifications. Sir Philip Francis, to whom Burke submitted the proof-sheets of the *Reflections*, at once with his usual rapid penetration discerned the weakness of the anti-revolutionary position. "The French of this day," he told Burke, "could not act as we did in 1688. They had no constitution as we had to recur to. They had no foundation to build upon. They had no walls to repair. Much less had they *the elements of a constitution very nearly as good as could be wished.* A proposition so extraordinary as this last ought to have been made out *in limine*, since the most important deductions are drawn from it."[1] But, though Burke insisted on drawing his deductions from it with sweeping impetuosity, neither he nor any one else has yet succeeded in establishing that all-important proposition.

What we desire to say, then, comes, in short, to this, that M. Taine has given an exaggerated importance to the literary and speculative activity

[1] Burke's *Correspondence*, iii. 157.

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of the last half-century of the old monarchy. In measuring the force of the various antecedents of the Revolution, he has assigned to books and philosophical ideas a place in the scale of dissolvent conditions that belongs more rightly to decayed institutions, to incompetent and incorrigible castes, to economic incongruities that could only be dealt with trenchantly. Books and ideas acquired a certain importance after other things had finally broken up the crumbling system. They supplied a formula for the accomplished fact. "It was after the Revolution had fairly begun," as a contemporary says, "that they sought in Mably and Rousseau for arms to sustain the system towards which the effervescence of some hardy spirits was dragging affairs. It was not the above-named authors who set people's heads aflame. M. Necker alone produced this effect, and determined the explosion." [1]

The predominance of a historic, instead of an abstract, school of political thought could have saved nothing. It could have saved nothing, because the historic or conservative organs and elements of society were incompetent to realise those progressive ideas which were quite as essential to social continuity as the historic ideas. The historic method in political action is only practicable on condition that some, at any rate, of the great established bodies have the sap of life in their members. In France not even the judiciary, usually the last to part from its ancient roots, was sound and quick. "The administration of justice," says Arthur Young, "was partial, venal, infamous. The conduct of the parliament was profligate and atrocious. The bigotry, ignorance, false principles, and tyranny of these bodies were generally conspicuous." [2] We know what the court

[1] Sénac de Meilhan, *Du gouvernement en France*, 129, etc. (1795).
[2] *Travels in France*, i. 603.

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was, we know what the noblesse was, and this is what the third great leading order in the realm was. We repeat, then, that the historic doctrine could get no fulcrum or leverage, and that only the revolutionary doctrine, which the eighteenth century had got ready for the crisis, was adequate to the task of social renovation.

Again, we venture to put to M. Taine the following question. If the convulsions of 1789–94 were due to the revolutionary doctrine, if that doctrine was the poison of the movement, how would he explain the firm, manly, steadfast, unhysterical quality of the American Revolution thirteen years before? It was theoretically based on exactly the same doctrine. Jefferson and Franklin were as well disciplined in the French philosophy of the eighteenth century as Mirabeau or Robespierre. The Declaration of Independence recites the same abstract and unhistoric propositions as the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Why are we to describe the draught which Rousseau and the others had brewed, as a harmless or wholesome prescription for the Americans, and as maddening poison to the French? The answer must be that the quality of the drug is relative to the condition of the patient, and that the vital question for the student of the old *régime* and the circumstances of its fall is what other drug, what better process, could have extricated France on more tranquil terms from her desperate case? The American colonists, in spite of the over-wide formulae of their Declaration, really never broke with their past in any of its fundamental elements. They had a historic basis of laws and institutions which was still sound and whole, and the political severance from England made no breach in social continuity. If a different result followed in France, it was not because France was the land of the classic spirit, but because her institutions were

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inadequate, and her ruling classes incompetent to transform them.

M. Taine's figure of the man who drains the poisonous draught, as having been previously "a little weak in constitution, but still sound and of peaceful habits," is entirely delusive. The whole evidence shows that France was not sound, but the very reverse of sound, and no inconsiderable portion of that evidence is to be found in the facts which M. Taine has so industriously collected in his own book. The description of France as a little weak in constitution, but still sound and of peaceful habits, is the more surprising to us because M. Taine himself had in an earlier page (p. 109), when summing up the results of Privilege, ended with these emphatic words: "Déjà avant l'écroulement final, la France est dissoute, et elle est dissoute parce que les privilégiés ont oublié leur caractère d'hommes publics." But then is not this rather more than being only a little weak in constitution, and still sound?

THE END

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